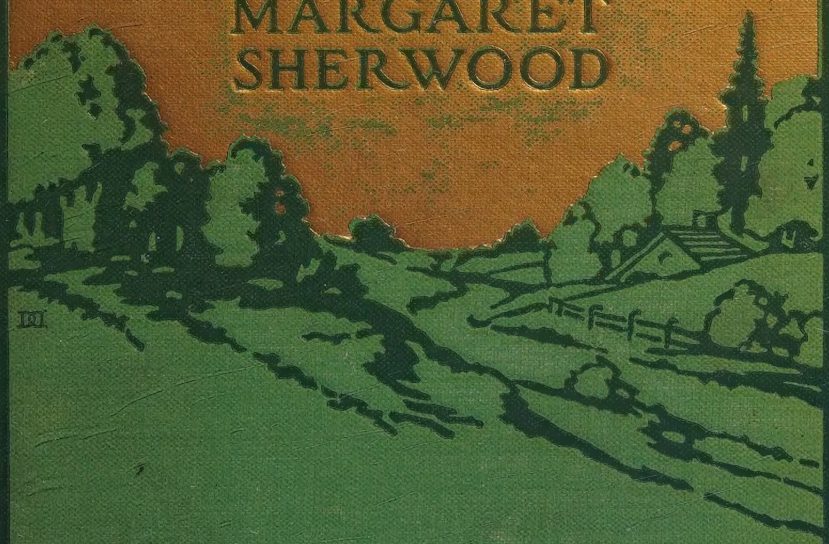
FAMILIAR WAYS

MARGARET SHERWOOD



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BY

MARGARET SHERWOOD

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1917

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FAMILIAR WAYS

THE LITTLE HOUSE

If we had known that it was going to prove such a tyrant we should never have taken it, as we did, for better or worse. It looked so gentle and confiding in its setting of green grass and apple trees the morning when we first saw it, that we could not resist the spell. The old-fashioned windows gave it an expression of which one reads in impassioned novels, making me feel as if the house and I had met and become one in the infinite earlier than time. It coaxed us with that feminine appeal almost impossible to withstand. The closed door and locked sashes, the grass in the walk, hinted at loneliness, suggested that we could understand; and so, because of its

quaintness, and the pathos of the hollowed doorstep, we took it for our own.

Doubtless the strong hold upon us was partly due to helplessness, for it was constantly appealing, in new kinds of need, as a child would. I had no idea that it would mean so much trouble; so small and sturdy and independent a thing would, I thought, more than half take care of itself. Oh, the work and the worry that have been expended on this diminutive house! The tasks it has thought up, the sudden needs wherewith it has confronted us! It has invention infinite in keeping itself before our minds. Chief among its devices is an air of suffering from neglect if we but venture out of its sight. Never have I failed to turn the last corner leading homeward with a leaping of the heart in fear of what may have happened. Suppose that it were gone, by fire or by flood; suppose it had never really been there, being but a dream, a figment of the imagination wherein my spirit has been resting, as at an inn, before the long journey begins again. The corner turned, there is always

something reassuring in the touch of my finger on the latch, telling me that the little house is still there, really there. When I grow angry at the tyrant for the homely tasks it suggests, the constant watchfulness it demands, it looks upon me with a mild expression of ancient wisdom about the roof, as one who, from old time, has known and pitied all fluctuations of human mood. There is something of eternal wisdom about a roof-line; when did man first learn to lift roofs against the stars?

I have fallen into the habit, as one always does with feminine creatures, of taking home things to please it, and I marvel at the personality which dominates its caprice. Now and then it disdains an offering for this or that corner, scorning a long-meditated gift; again it will seize upon some insignificant thing, for wise, inscrutable purposes, making it beautiful as part of itself, so that one could almost swear that the little house has organic life. Lately it has refused to shelter perfectly reputable reproductions of the old masters; certain Madonnas heretofore tolerated it will no longer

live with. On the other hand, the long strip of ecclesiastical embroidery, harmoniously faded, purchased, after much haggling, at the Rag Market at Rome, it has graciously accepted, as it did the antique lamp of bronze. Pictures of trees, and of waves breaking upon shores far and near it eagerly invites. Books it indulgently allows in any numbers, — all but elaborate gift books, — as who should say, "All people must have their vices, and yours is fairly innocent." Such charity becomes it well, for itself hath vice, a ruinous, consuming thirst for old mahogany, a passion that may yet lead us to the debtor's prison, or its modern substitute, whatever that may be.

The measure of its hold upon me is the depth of its understanding; at first glance I knew that it was *simpatica*, as the Italians say. In those tired moments when one shrinks from human beings, the companionship of the quiet corner is all in all, and there is no such rest elsewhere as comes from watching the shadows of the woodbine flicker in the moonlight upon the old-fashioned mirror by the window. In

times of grief it knows that nothing else can comfort; one learns in its wise silences. How many births and deaths it has lived through I do not know, but lately we have seen how wide its narrow door may swing upon eternity. Living through many lives, gleaning long experience, the little house seems — as one who has known it all before — to fold mere individual sorrows in the long sorrow of the race.

In such manifold ways of giving and demanding it has so tightened its hold upon us that we wear its bonds on hand and foot. The moment of strongest contest of will between us came with our need of going far away. The little house put its foot down, insisting that we should go nowhere that it could not go. It dominated, coaxed, said that it needed care, was sorrowful, and sometimes merely silent, suggesting that it knew perfectly well we could not get away from it if we tried. As usual, it was right. What messengers it sends! Now subtle ones: quivering aspen twig or blown leaf of autumn suddenly reminds us that we cannot go beyond its creep-

ing shadow. Though we fare over leagues of sea, we get no farther than its chimney; great Jupiter swings across the eastern sky to lead us to the elm tree by the back door. In Grasmere's lovely green and gray of storied mountain pasture, which almost persuade us that we have wandered into another world of too delicate beauty to be called part of earth, the sudden howl of a street musician, —

"There's a h'old fashioned cottage, with h'ivy round the door, —"

going on to certain statements about a sanded floor, and the assertion, —

"Where'er I roam I will always think of home, —"

compels us back.

When I waken, watching the sunlight flood Pentelicon, dim blue against the clear gold of a Grecian dawn, I feel the little house tugging softly at my heartstrings, just a slight tug, to say, "You may have your fling, but you cannot escape me; sooner or later you will come back." At Agamemnon's awful threshold I think upon my own, and Argive

Hera's ruined doorway fills me with longing for humbler portals not yet battered down. It is hard to tread always another's stairs, even though they be the exquisite carven marble stairways of the château-land; and the sheepfolds of Scotch hills or wide French plains bring a sudden sinking of the heart to one who wanders far, unfolded yet. Ah, yes, however far we stray into the storied past, the little house puts its finger on us and we come.

It makes no reproaches for our having gone, but it does not quite admit us to its old confidence, or as yet go back to its old ways. Watchful, seemingly indifferent, it waits aloof, yet still it stands, as heretofore, with that look of immemorial wisdom, making the old demands. Soon will come the old concessions, and the earlier understanding.

What will be the end I do not know, but this spot of earth seems to have laid its spell upon me for life, and yet beyond. Long ago, one summer night of opened windows, with cool leaves just beyond, silent as the stars,

I dreamed of lying under the turf of the door-yard, and of being taken back, in wholly pleasant fashion, into the elements, immeasurably rested from myself by being absorbed into green living grass.

OUR VENETIAN LAMP

It was made in the fashion of the lamps of Saint Mark's, a flat disk of bronze open-work holding a cup of dull red glass for olive oil, with a pineapple-shaped pendant below, all hung by wrought bronze chains. When we looked at it first, it seemed as if it would bring into our New England home something of the dim glory of the old cathedral, glowing faintly, like the inside of some ancient jewel, with the clear small light of its sacred lamps just breaking its lasting twilight. Doubtless we thought, too, of the impression that it would make upon our village, which is ever awake to a sense of the æsthetic. There were a few dollars left after purchasing, in a little shop behind the cathedral, the lace doylies which have lately met deep appreciation from our neighbors, and we eagerly purchased the

bronze lamp. Our vote, made up of two voices, is almost never a tie.

It was a curious walk that we took to get it, along the side of green canals, over miniature carved bridges, led by the undying charm of Old Venice: not the Venice of the Grand Canal, overrun by foreign folk, desecrated by steamboats, but the ancient city, whose sequestered life still goes on in her *piazzette* and in tiny shops peeping out from under dark-browed houses. To her belong white-haired cobblers, busily tapping in their tiny spaces six feet by five; brown, wrinkled, ageless dames guarding tiny stores of peaches, cherries, plums, in almost imperceptible markets. It seemed to us, as we bargained for the lamp in a dusky little shop all agleam with bronze and things of brass, that a glimpse of it would at any moment summon before us the beauty of fading colors and fretted outlines in this city of the sea.

How we packed it, with its chains, and its curving, bulky pendant, so beautiful when hanging from the ceiling, so impossible in a

trunk; how it wrinkled our garments and made holes in them, I leave to the imagination of the reader. All seemed of small account when we saw it hanging in our hall, where it lent, we thought, a grace of other worlds and earlier days — though it was palpably new — to a rigid American stairway, and a wall-paper a bit antique without being therefore lovely. It gave an air of permanence to the place, even to the oaken coat-hanger which had been put up by feminine hands and which invariably came down with the coat. What though our fingers were often sticky with olive oil, as we dived vainly with a pair of inadequate tin pincers for the floating wicks that would not float? A dimly red, religious light pervaded our hall, and, if we tried hard enough, it transported us to Venice.

The dim light had its disadvantages, nor did it always lead caller or hostess into a religious mood. Incoming and outgoing guests sometimes collided, and it fostered in us an already marked tendency to call people by

wrong names. Sometimes it went out altogether, and our friends stepped from our lighted sitting-room into total darkness, kicked our little mahogany table, and ran into the umbrella-stand. The climax of trouble, however, came in the insane tendency developed by all comers to run into our lamp. No June bug is more persistent in bumping into electric-light bulbs than were one and all in heading for our sacred flame; and lard oil — for olive oil had been pronounced too expensive, and we never let our æsthetic longings betray us into rashness in our village — dropped upon more than one head, more than one hat. The clergyman went all too near, and drops of oil not sacred fell upon his head; an editor — and we esteem editors not less than clergymen — bore away unsightly drippings upon a silk hat too gallantly waved; young girls who were calling developed unexpected statures, — we could have sworn when it was hung that our lamp swung higher than any human head. This thing of bronze seemed to grow sensitive, vibrated to impassioned

farewells, and laughed joyously at fortunate partings. Yet we toiled over it gladly, — though wicks floated to the bottom, and matches broke and tumbled in, and the silly pincers would not work. Our maid, possibly because she was a Scotch Presbyterian, sternly refused to have anything to do with the object, except once when we found her secretly engaged with it in the kitchen: she had scoured all the manufactured look of age away from it with sápolio.

Then a little girl friend came to spend an afternoon with us. I can see her now, with her golden curls, white dress, and her pink silk stockings, as she stood upon the stairs and swung the pretty lamp and laughed aloud. A new stair carpet was the result. Our guest went away, and we returned to the quiet of our little home, and to our sacred gloom, which was now partly of the mind. We had grown a bit nervous in our musings; our low questions, — "Doesn't it fairly make you see the green water in the canals?" or, "Can't you hear the gondolas gliding along?" — were

likely to be interrupted by a shriek: "Is that thing spilling over?"

The crowning achievement of our Venetian lamp came one July night when we were awaiting two distinguished guests. It was burning softly, enveloping our whole cottage in an artistic atmosphere, and we congratulated ourselves, as we walked up and down in fresh white gowns, on how greatly our distinguished guests would appreciate it. The house was spotless: did we not always try to keep it so? But was an added touch of polish too much for such visitors?

At 9.30 we remembered that the mattress for the cot must be brought downstairs, our house — alas that I must confess the secrets of our housekeeping! — having, in reality, room for but one distinguished guest, it being thus necessary for one hostess to sleep in the library. The maid, like a sensible woman, had gone to bed; had she been awake she would have saved us from this, as from many another folly. A brilliant idea occurred to us, for we are as fertile in inventive processes

as the Swiss Family Robinson or Robinson Crusoe, though our devices do not always work out, as did theirs, with automatic regularity to the advantage of the planner. The mattress, neatly curled, should roll downstairs. What is intelligence for, if not to save trouble? We started it; it leaped, sprang like a sentient thing, turned a somersault, stood upright, flung itself upon the lamp, which, as if touched to life, responded to the challenge, vital energy quivering along its speaking chains. And now ensued a mortal combat, to which only the pen of a Victor Hugo could do justice. It was such a fight as would have occurred if his memorable runaway cannon had indeed gone overboard into the water and there had encountered the octopus of *The Toilers of the Sea*. Tentacles leaped out from the lamp; the mattress hit back with all the power of its uncoiled strength: the swinging bronze bulb responded with a blow, pouring out — alas, no dragon of fairy story could hurl forth from its throat anything worse than lard oil!

The distinguished guests arrived at this

moment to find floor, ceiling, mattress, stairs, bespattered with oil. Villainous wicks from that villainous receptacle were lodged upon our best umbrellas, and even upon the backs of our necks, and greasy fragments of red glass were flung as far as the middle of the dining-room floor and out upon the walk.

It was after the distinguished guests were gone, after the kalsominers and the carpet-man had finished, that we took our Venetian lamp and a gardening trowel and went to the far corner of our green yard, where already many precious things lie buried. There we dug a hole. There the Venetian lamp lies buried, by Fluff, who died in the prime of cathood, by her two kittens, who perished at five days old, by the baby bluebird that Rex caught, and by the squirrel, brought home from a snowbank, wounded to the death, to fade away upon our hands. Some future investigator, thousands of years hence, may dig it up, and exclaim over the beauty of taste of the aborigines. Perhaps he can afford æsthetic sensations; we cannot.

HOUSE-CLEANING

I

The old rite of spring house-cleaning is, I am told, falling into disuse, with the new improvements in household machinery. I can but regret its passing, for it would seem to have both practical and symbolic value, allying itself with other spring observances which celebrate casting off the husks of the old, the coming of new life, when earth and human beings waken together to a fresh mood of hope and of vigor. Such were the Demeter festivals in the south; in the north, those of the ancient pagan May Day, with their dances and fresh garlands; and other half-religious ceremonies which go back to the dawn of time.

Here, in our quiet village, we hold to this grand spring purification, as we do to other

old usages, in part spectators, in part actors therein, constantly stirred to meditation, quickened in memory. There are fingers astir in corners long untouched; there are shadowy cobwebs swept away. It is a fine sight to see, all down the street, on the green lawns, rugs being beaten, cushions shaken; windows are being washed; soap-suds are applied to the lintels of the doorways with almost sacerdotal fervor. Out on long lines hang many garments airing in the sweet April sunshine; dusty things share for a time the life of fresh growing grass. The carpet-beating man is in constant requisition; he knows himself the most important personage in town, and wears his brief glory with a not unkingly air. There is great rivalry in regard to the scrub-women, who have inherited, if not all the joyousness of their dancing predecessors, singing in the spring, at least some of their activity. The painters are all too few, but busy on every side; there are green or brown smudges on passing noses. Our suspense is deep in regard to the color of paint in buckets into which

brushes are constantly dipped, for the matter is of great moment. Heaven grant that no mistaken blues, or sulphurous yellows, or unholy magenta shades emerge to buffet our spirits during the coming year! Kalsominers with their pallid pails go past in spotted white, like Pierrots suddenly awakened to a sense of the seriousness of life and its burdens.

Everywhere is stir, motion, life, — it may be only the quick motion of feet escaping from the stream of warm water, which trickles by mistake down the front path; pulses go more rapidly, as fingers fly; wholesome excitement reigns. Through it all, one sees the satisfied faces of householders, as of those who have attained; and the wistful faces of domestic animals, astray in a world whose ideals are beyond their reach.

It is not that we are unaware of modern devices, which keep this constant cleansing of the human habitation going on imperceptibly and do away with the necessity of the annual or semi-annual upheaval. We are aware of them, and we use them, but gingerly, and

with full knowledge of their limitations. The past has given us a standard which we refuse to forget as we face the new. Our mistrust is deepened by a belief that it is the most poverty-stricken in mind, spirit, and estate who are the staunchest upholders of the newest inventions. I shall not soon forget my brief visit to the junk-man's home, where I found "himself" and "herself" sitting at leisure in one of the two rooms of their cabin, surrounded by their entire possessions. All their bottles, dishes, cooking utensils stood about them on their unclean floor, amid random piles of dirt. Their faces wore an air of pleased expectancy; they were waiting, they said, for the vacuum cleaner. Vacuum cleaner, indeed! Nothing but yellow soap and hot, hot water and sapolio could have made that room fit for human habitation.

This memory is one of the many reasons why I pin a towel about my head and dust my beloved books myself, fingering them anxiously to see if aught in leaf or binding has come to harm. The word vacuum is

unthinkable in connection with any one of them, I sometimes think, as the opened page perhaps betrays me, and I sit down, in all the confusion, to joy and brief oblivion.

There is dead monotony about these new housekeeping ways, each week the same process, mechanical, perfunctory. There is no rhythm of ebb and flow, no grand tidal wave of energy and feeling that seeks to accomplish the impossible, and succeeds in accomplishing the improbable. Where is gone that swelling aspiration of old days, that inner assurance that, were all made perfect once in order and cleanliness, no disorder could ever again prevail? Some such mood of high spiritual adventure was surely Thoreau's when he wrote, —

"The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year that will drown out all our muskrats."

Back of each of these old-fashioned household earthquakes was some grand effort of

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the human will, a resolution, a sense of great deeds to be performed. Ultimate and utter confusion evoked the energy of the human spirit, which rose successfully to meet it. Order came out of disorder, the splendid triumph of cosmos dawning on chaos, a far-off quiver of that magnificent, burning mood of the Creator, — "Let there be light!" Such a crisis is a test of your part in the final order. A world is in ruins at your feet: show what you can do. Mental collectedness, singleness of aim, steadiness of purpose, are imperative. The grand, artistic principle of choice, of selection, must reign, — that principle which makes art, art, and literature, literature, the power of discerning the essential, — it is your test! Box and chest are to be gone over, with that persistent problem of life and of philosophy before you, — what is to be discarded, what is to be kept?

II

Roused by a prophetic sense of the possible suffering of those who come after me, I bestir

myself. I must not leave all this miscellany, intellectual and other, — for there are boxes of old papers as well as trunks of clothing, — to my unfortunate heirs. Which bundles of silk or of serge, which rolls of muslin are to be kept, as perhaps serving some yet undiscovered purpose in the renewed life? Those left-over rolls of a beloved wall-paper which covered our living-room walls in past happy days, — how can I throw them away without throwing away something of that life which they recall? Which of the treasured, flawed, delicate dishes may still remain, not for use but for remembering, upon our shelves? Which are to go, as fragmentary as ourselves, into the ash-barrel, to await the test, the crucible, the resurrection in some form into a part of life again?

There are garments well-nigh sacred, seeming not of mere cloth, garments which, more than most treasured things, have the power of poignantly stirring the memory, bringing the wearer before us, quick, alive in look and in gesture. One may give them away, but

with a struggle: old finely-tucked silken dresses of leaf-brown ill beseem the grandams of the slums; the quaint children's garments, preserved in the mysterious old green chest full of subtle fragrances, — secret place of hid treasures whose depths even house-cleaning dared not disturb, — would be but scorned by the little aliens who yearn for the latest styles.

One can decide the great things of life, after sufficient deliberation; one has to! There are destinies to face, grave reasons to be weighed for going or staying, for saying yes or no. The balance, in time, slowly and reasonably tips this way or that; but how shall one decide whether to keep or to burn the little treasures, — the half curl, the old picture, the package of letters tied by a cord which, in all probability, will never be undone? And yet, to see them vanish in flakes of gray ash, so that they never could be read, would be hard. Here is the test of one's mettle, the measure of one's power of decision.

What accidents, discoveries, what precious

bits of drift upon that flowing tide of spring time! I too have come upon exceeding treasure, have come suddenly, and with holding of the breath. Never old wills, — such vulgar happenings are relegated rightly to paper-covered fiction. As all real treasures are treasures of the spirit, one digs deep, deep in the hoard of the past for other values. A line, a sentence in familiar handwriting upon a yellowing scrap of paper may show a depth of soul undiscovered before in some one loved. I have known reconciliation to take place between long-estranged friends when a forgotten flake of paper brought back an old mood of faith and trust.

A single house-cleaning may bring your priest-like youth to minister to your relaxing middle age, in the rediscovery of some written witness to what you once were. Far, far along the dusty road, — it may be even meditating retreat, — you meet your old self face to face, the morning sunlight on its forehead, in the freshness, vigor, hope of youth. The inspired, accusing eyes, the sense of being able

to do all, — from such an encounter you turn again, shamefaced, to the onward track, because one, it may be sole survivor of that past, expects something of you. The old, impassioned resolve, brought back by a few written words, pierces your very breast. Husk by husk your later self is stripped away, and the real you, in all the simplicity of high intent, released from the mood of discouragement and failure, is ready to start again.

III

Again that wholesome sound of scrubbing, of running water, that chill atmosphere of fresh whitewash, something half way between the world of the living and that of the dead, recalling, by some trick of odor, the catacombs of Rome with their cool dampness, and, inevitably, their hint of new and fairer life, — the undying hope of immortality written in symbols there.

Old memories associate this new freshness with the breath of delicate wild flowers abroad in the house, and lilies of the valley

whose fragrance stole long ago across chill May days of household lustration. This is the time of the quickening of all things, of casting off the old, of the building of the nests, and of all other sweet spring sights and sounds. We share this mood of spring in the joy of renewal; here is the perpetual youth of the race!

I fancy that this spring house-cleaning has in it something of the potency of the confessional in the laying bare of old, sad secrets, and the ensuing sense of sudden lightness, — I speak only from imagination, for I have never been to the confessional; I sometimes wish I had! — of having made a clean breast of it, of being even with life, of shaking off forever the dust of the past.

Then, the peace of the after-moments, when all is sweet, clean, prepared; Utopian moments, too perfect to last, — surely these are a foretaste of perfectness to come, if the hopes of the highest-hearted among us are granted, full of new sense of the beauty of old things, with the ugly and outworn cast away. Earth's

utmost has been done, in the purifying fires and the cleansing that has searched all corners, — as cleansing griefs have left the spirit prepared and ready.

THE VEGETABLE SELF

We have heard much about the repetition in the individual of the life of the race, and doubtless the least observant among us have noted confirmatory tokens, as, for instance, the tendency of the human young to walk on four legs, and those stages of urchin life which suggest only too vividly the actions of primitive man. It is strange that no one has had much to say about the fact that we reach further back, beyond our human selves, beyond our vertebrate selves, even beyond the power of motion, to a primal fixedness. There are moments in my experience, and they multiply as I grow older, when I am distinctly aware, through all the intricacies of being since that early dim existence, of my kinship with the first lichen clinging to the first rock. Wiser than I have talked of reminiscent intimations

of immortality; to me come intimations of petal, stem, and root. There are certain moods for which our kinship with the animal world cannot account, leaf and bark moods, a feeling of identity with waving grass and with wind-tossed branches. Sometimes rain falling on the face and hands brings sensations of which mere flesh and blood are incapable; those moments when you breathe through your fingers, and those when your whole heavy body becomes translucent in the sun demand explanation. You long, then, to slough off the vertebræ and skull, and spread yourself leaf-wise upon the air. This elusive yet poignant comprehension of phases of being in the vegetable world makes you say, as Whitman did of animals: "Did I pass that way a long time ago?"

Now that nature students have demonstrated that plants have eyes, and that they have consciousness — both facts which we ignorant folk could have told them long ago, but for the unaccountable habit of the wise never to take counsel of fools — I trust that some great

scientist will add, with proofs, that plants have ears, for they have; and finger-tips, for they have; and manifold sensitiveness with which they are not usually credited. Nay, some may prove that they have souls, though, when you come to think of it, it has not been scientifically demonstrated that we have them ourselves. I remember many a call to the spirit through the world of green things. The ragged crests of the militant hemlocks in the West Wôods, telling of centuries of struggle with wind and sleet, and the worn and twisted cedars clinging to rocks along the coast, wear the look that you now and then see upon an aged, "unsurrendered face", recording an experience that has not been all defeat.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of our kinship with the world of fixed and rooted life comes in our devotion to things. There is a terrible story by Balzac, *Le Curé de Tours*, written with that masterly realism whereby his records of human experience are bitten into our minds as with acid following the graving of an etcher's tool, the story of

the Abbé Birotteau, who loved with consuming passion another's household possessions, and inherited them, only to lose them through trickery, losing with them health and all the joy of life. I doubt if any other writer has ever portrayed so vividly that fatal human clinging to objects which I believe is a survival from our vegetable state. Balzac asserts that celibates — old maids, bachelors, priests — are most subject to this low form of human experience. So menacing is his power of presenting his ideas that I always believe him, whether I will or no, and I plead guilty, not only of belonging to one of the despised classes, but of possessing an inordinate love of objects, of which he speaks so scornfully, not of jewels, or of garments, but of certain places and certain things which have grown all but human from their long association with human life.

As I say this, I recall, from my earlier days, that southern doorway of my grandfather's old house, with the broad stone steps, and the gravelled path by which the single red roses bloomed in June, and I remember the clock

with the green weeping willow picture upon its face and the straight-backed, rush-seated, chairs. The aged folk whose white heads I see against this background had grown one with their great maples for nearly ninety years, and I cannot separate them in my thought from the flowers that blossomed about their door.

As these pictures come back in memory I realize that I, too, am growing fast daily to the spot in which I live, becoming part of my bit of earth. With our apple trees I have put down root for root, which will not come up without a wrench; the fibres of my being which have twisted about the mahogany settle and highboy will tear them and me if broken apart. I am anything but a clinging vine; temperament and profession forbid that, and yet, to the old-fashioned serving table, the windows toward the west, even to certain copper pots and pans, cling tendrils that put to shame woodbine fingers with their violent hold. The fine and fibrous roots that spread; the great lonely roots that take earth

into a deadly grip, and the hard, curling tentacles which grasp lintel and eaves so fatally that withdrawing them means death — I know them all.

There are aspects of this phase of human life which are pleasant; there are others which might well fill one with apprehension. The tendency to hold fast being inevitable, how shall one abide the fear of going away? I have been meaning to ask some learned botanist or florist if many plants share with certain ferns the tendency to wither and die if the pot containing them is but carried from one room to another. I, growing downward with unnumbered fibres of New England grass, shiver lest some rude wind of destiny may tear me up. With terror I hear the fiat that I must rend all ties and spend next year in Greece. If this come to pass, shall I be better than an uprooted vegetable? Can I send down roots among those cold, perfect stones? Even now, for brief spaces, in strange spots, I have a sense of withering, a baseless feeling, as of a plant cut sharply off. What if homesickness

is, after all, but reminiscence, a dim, unconscious memory of roots?

Reflection opens up many a subject of inquiry, on which Sir Thomas Browne might well have speculated. Are not our throes to discover a fixed and irrevocable theology or philosophy a harking back to that immobile time, an attempt to shirk the consequences of having come to life, a desire to return to a state of being from which relentless nature, now that we have once departed, sternly banishes us? How many of us may be seen in the lichen state, cowering full length upon a stone; how many in the sea-anemone stage, feebly moving tentacles in endless circles, forgetting that our spiritual life is that of the quest, and that the great gift of motion was granted us that we might move — it may be, for, spite of unceasing efforts, the old hope has not been disproved — toward some great end.

It is a curious question, too, why reminiscent hints of primitive animal life should come so early in the life of the individual, the tendency to return to vegetable ways so late. Indubi-

tably it is to the aged and the aging that it comes, and none could claim that it represents the height of our achievement, being rather but a quiet descent. It is a kindly experience, not like those violent emotions which rend and tear us in the heyday of our lives; gently accustoming us to the ways of earth, preparing us for the time when we shall feel, if not the daisies, at least the grass growing over us.

A SABBATICAL YEAR

I SOMETIMES wonder, in my leisure moments — and they are all leisure moments now — how the story of the Garden would have run if it had been the other way about, — if our first parents, instead of being driven out of Eden, had been ordered in. Sitting here with my windows open to the sky of Greece; the Parthenon, beyond the flat roofs of the city, standing against the blue; all the wonder and glory of the ancient world drifting dimly about the long ridge of Hymettus to the east, and the mountains of Argolis to the south, I fall to thinking, first of that far-away den where so many hours of my life have been ground out, with its grim desk of many pigeonholes, its shelves of books, its severe ink-bottle, and its relentless pens, and then, unaccountably enough, I begin to think of Adam and Eve.

Suppose they had been created of earth outside the Garden; imagine them some evening sitting at the door of their wattled hut, tired of the long day's work at the wooden plough, — I doubt not that it would take both of them to manage it, as it does to-day on the uplands of Greece. One can see the tired donkey browsing on the slightly browned grass, the sheep and goats lying about under the guardianship of the dog, the chickens slowly finding their way to their roost in the olive tree, the red rim of sunset in the west, and Adam taking a draught of water, rare and precious in this dry land, out of one of those gourd-shaped jars that antedate recorded history. One can hear Eve — the kerchief that has protected her head from the burning sun all day folded about baby Cain to keep out the evening damp — one can hear tired Eve crooning her first-born to sleep, and then —

Suppose that an angel, beautiful and blinding, had swept toward earth's first poor home, frightening the sheep and the donkey, who would take to their heels over dry acanthus and

withered grass, scaring the chickens until they fluttered squawking from the olive tree, waking baby Cain to his first roar of defiance against divine command, — suppose that this terrible angel, I say, instead of barring them from Paradise, had commanded them to go in.

One can almost share the anxious hours of planning in the dark, the wonderment about what to take, Adam's uncertainty as to the need of his sheep-skin coat, Eve's decision against her distaff, the whole bewildered debating that attends any packing, that would attend most of all this august preparation for Paradise. One can imagine the broken sleep, those glory-haunted dreams that verge on nightmare, and that waking, in the clear golden dawn, to grief at parting with dog and donkey, and to fear that wolf and jackal would spoil the little herd. One can follow that slow journey eastward to the flaming gate, eyes shaded by the hand to make its glory bearable, eyes shaded by the hand to catch the last glimpse of the hut that was home.

And then — but I have no way of picturing

the splendor of Paradise; have I ever been there? Certain long-past moments of vivid life might perhaps give a suggestion of the awe and wonder it would rouse: that first glimpse of Italy, for instance, years and years ago, with southern sunshine on brown hill and cypress, or the glory of white Alps at sunrise. Dimly one can realize the awful joy of those first moments, broken suddenly by a grating sound as the angel shuts the gate.

And then, the greenness, the witchery of strange paths, the glamour of it all. Set with trees of all kinds, its loveliness was assured; cedars of Lebanon, tall fronded palms, cypresses; and surely writ, if not holy writ, assures us that the silver birch is there:

> "And by the gates of Paradise
> The birk grew fair eneugh."

That, of course, may mean inside, and should; no tree is fitter. One can imagine — inadequately of course, if one could imagine anything adequately it would not be imagining, — the innumerable, many-colored, feathered

things among the bewildering branches, and the delight in watching their strange manœuvres. One can share Eve's surprise and delight in finding little Cain no longer heavy to carry, for one is not allowed to imagine burdens in Eden. Stream by stream they would wander, exploring the four rivers; tree by tree would lead them on; and many an innocent fruit, even unforbidden apple, would they test, Cain doubtless struggling vainly for his share. One can dimly see the undiscovered flowers, tall, white lilies, saffron roses, and a million many-tinted, fragrant things. One can be glad for that lightness of the heart in relief from old troubles, the sense of the illimitable riches of idleness, the joy of endless sunshine and endless leisure.

And yet it is easy to see how, after a little, the hands of these two honest toilers would begin, unconsciously, to reach out toward the old plough handle, drawing quickly back in shame; how Eve would begin to worry about the lightness of Cain upon her back, longing for the pressure of the old sweet burden. One

can understand the sidelong glances with which their eyes would wander past the bird of paradise, in search of those familiar feathered things of home. After all, could one spend eternity at the Zoo? With the "honey-dew" of Paradise on their lips they would think wistfully of the humble noon-day meal of old days, taken as they sat cross-legged under the olive trees. With their first misgivings how they would begin to entertain each other! How they would point out effects of line and of color! One can hear their increasing assurances to each other of how delightful it all was; but, in the silences, all the old hard things would come trooping back in memory: the death of their first donkey, the hunger, of that first year of tilling the soil, before the crops were ripe, and remembered anguish would be twice as hard to bear as any day's brave facing of present hardships. So, shade by shade, one becomes aware of the misery of their splendid loneliness as they sit under alien palms, their anguish of heart when the day's sight-seeing is over, and evening

comes, the time for the folding of the sheep. How Eve would long to set to rights the wattled hut, but oh, the goats might already have eaten the wattled hut! Alas, for the pointlessness of Paradise: no spot more sacred than another, in all this magnificent expanse, no centre called home. Where is the old preciousness of water, with water everywhere? Where the sense of the divine right of well-earned rest? For some reason the story seems far sadder than that of the expulsion from the Garden. One has not the heart to follow these poor exiles in Eden, doomed to endless holiday, through more than one day; how then shall one endure a year, a Sabbatical year? But I must stop lest I blaspheme; and see, the sun is going down in golden glory behind the Parthenon, with promise of a fine day for sight-seeing to-morrow. It is not for one of stern Presbyterian descent to minimize the primal curse of toil.

IT IS WELL TO BE OFF WITH THE OLD HOUSE BEFORE YOU ARE ON WITH THE NEW

If the little old house had been more gracious when we came back to it from our months of wandering, this never would have happened. Perhaps it could not forgive us for going away. It would have nothing to do with us, was sulky, remote, inaccessible, a little house of frowning blinds and closed doors. When spring came, and the apple trees about it put forth no green leaves, we realized, startled, that they had died. Had they perhaps missed us even more than we missed them? The neighbors hinted San José scale; we repudiated the suggestion with scorn. In all our coming and going, unpacking, settling, visiting old corners, the house feigned a lofty indifference, and would have sat down cat-wise if it could, with its back turned toward us, its

tail curled rigidly round. We hoped that this was only a mood, but it proved lasting. When we spoke it would not listen; when we listened it would not speak, as of old; it would yield up no shade of its experience for us when we were puzzled, no ray of comfort when we were sad. Its inexorable coldness lasted so long that at last it drove us out, wondering that this ever could have seemed home, to seek a spot where we could build a house of our very own.

When, after long search, we had found it, and had shamefacedly concealed the secret for days in our hearts, hoping that the little house would not understand, it suddenly began again to exercise its old charm. It became irresistible, smiling on us under April showers, inviting to soft, homelike corners, summoning blue-bird and robin to sing to us. The rain on the roof brought a sense of loss; we should never again be so near the roof! Rooms that had seemed too small and cramped suddenly became spacious and beautiful, yet we resolutely followed our stern purpose.

Perhaps if our plot of land had been less difficult to win, we should not have pursued it with such zest. This was a minx of a bit of real estate, full of shifts and wiles, of swift advance and swifter withdrawals. It lay at the end of the village, where all beyond was meadow; we had wished it so. Groups of white birches gave it a delicate beauty, and made it seem the very edge of created things. Perhaps it was the breezes in those shivering birch-leaves that brought to us a sense of quest. Ultimate possession seemed as impossible as ultimate possession of the ideal, or of the human heart. Such an appealing, evasive bit of land never before existed, and Alexander in the history, Tamerlane in the play, got the earth more easily than we got this fifteen-thousand-square-foot plot of ground. For all its demure look it had wiles within wiles, toils within toils, for the confusion of humankind.

In the first place, its owner was in heaven; how could we read our title clear on earth without his signature? In the second place,

some of the heirs were in the Philippines. Sometimes the little house seemed to chuckle softly to itself in the twilight as we recounted our difficulties, involving minor children, three unsettled estates, and lapsed guardianship coming from another death. The executor wished to sell; we wished to buy, but the tangle of the law was about us in tight meshes, and we were in a state of paralysis where, it if was sad to reflect what man has made of man, it was sadder to reflect what man has made of real estate. The little house developed into a gleeful and impish thing, entering gayly into the plot against us. Did we not miss the lawyer's call because the bell refused to ring? Did it not swallow up somewhere in its plentiful cracks and crevices the letter with the foreign postmark that might have ended our difficulties sooner? It wore in those days of uncertainty a look of amused skepticism, as of lifted eyebrows, about those upper windows with their rounded frames.

Between coaxing wiles, bewitching as a kitten's, and threats about our state of mind

if we should go away, it nearly won us back, recalling all those moments of insight, vision, dream, inevitably connected with itself, until it seemed as if the rare flashes of light on things could come only under this roof. The frost-bitten window-panes, the deep snow outside, the icicles at the corner of the dormer window,

"When Dick the shepherd blows his nail;"

those later days of open windows, with murmuring life in the air, the rose-touched apple-blossoms drifting across the threshold, — where should we find them again? It had a thousand ways of intimating that, though we might build a house larger, more airy, with wide porches, we should never build one that would be, like this, the very heart of home. *Have you not found,* the little house kept asking, *in all your traveling by land and by sea, that that which you seek cannot be overtaken by swift footsteps? For true content, the lagging feet, the nimble soul.* Here had come the sense that comes, perhaps, in but one spot in the wide universe, too delicate, too evanescent to

be repeated, the subtle, indefinable sense of long-abiding.

To each of us, once in a lifetime, is granted a nook or a cranny where he may stand with back against the wall, facing the eternities and the immensities. It is a refuge from wide, empty, endless space, and from the threatened golden streets of heaven. It is consolation for the eternal shifting and changing of this inexplicable, swift, windy world, bringing — is it but a dream? — a sense of something fixed, enduring, permanent.

The little house said as much in its more eloquent moments, but it was our turn to be cold and haughty, and to turn an alien face. When our uncertainties as to title were over, and our plans went on apace, it sat and listened while we talked of what our new home should have, garden, pergola, enchanting gables, but it said never a word. Yet there grew up in us from its dumb reproach a sense of the limitations of the new one. It would be ignorant of the basic facts of life, with no experiences, no traditions. Birth and death were

secrets to it; it would be blind in the face of the morning sun, and of the evening star, with so much to learn, so much to learn! We, in the old one, had been comforted by its age, consoled by its brave way of holding out; had found it faithful as companionship grew rare, and death and distance robbed us of our own. This would have none of the gentleness of judgment that comes from having loved and suffered. We must start a tradition, and live up to it, must keep it unspotted, must share forever here the fierce, crude, white idealism of youth. Constantly with us, as we carried on the sad packing of our earthly all, was the sense that we had had, before finding this little hired house, of wandering through endless space in enduring homelessness.

There had been something fine and free in our relationship; did we like to stay just because we could go if we chose? Perhaps the heavy deed which legalized our possession of that other spot would destroy all delight, in its substitution of external hold for that

which endures only while affection lasts. "Until death us do part", has a solemn sound, and, as we signed the last check completing our ownership, we knew that this was our ultimate venture.

The time came when we drove away with the last of our possessions, leaving the little house alone, gray in the gray twilight, as it had often before been abandoned, through death or perfidy, faithful still to its old trust of harboring human life. I thought of Theseus, and of Ariadne left lonely on the shore of Naxos; of Jason and Medea, — and here I hastily peered into the hamper containing the two cats, sole children of our home, — vengeance must not light on them! — of Æneas, who also went on his way to found a new house; and of Dido, — oh, I hoped this would not burn!

As we drove under the shadowy elms of the village street toward our new, untried threshold, I realized that I had nothing left to learn about the deserters of all time.

REAL ESTATE

I

SEVERAL years ago I was told of two clergymen, acquaintances of mine, who had just given up their chosen calling to go into real estate business. The fact lingered long in my mind, with a certain discomfort, making me scan past and future with dim misgivings. Real estate versus the realm of the spirit — I did not like the antithesis. So they had forsaken the Heavenly City for Long Island, the exposition of the charm of golden streets for the new boulevard! But is the Pennsylvania Railroad, I asked indignantly, any true substitute for the narrow way? For a time I felt bankrupt, as one does when some great crisis has caused panic, subverted values, made worthless the priceless securities of yes-

terday. My inheritance seemed to depreciate rapidly, for my ancestors had staked their all upon that invisible reality which is now being quoted lower and lower in the markets of the world. Did they, I asked myself, who turned their faces heavenward with so rich a sense of possession, after all die intestate? From the innermost corner of my soul came the echoed answer, "No!" and again I hugged my old cloak of dreams about me, resolving that, whatever befell, I would never join the rank of those who could misinterpret the word "real" as meaning mere things.

That was three years ago. Now, alas! I have fallen from my high estate of the invisible. I, too, have come to traffic in so-called "real estate", not with a view of providing other people with homes, but to providing myself. I have deserted my sky-chamber, and have purchased a small piece of ground. No longer have I the right to scorn those who mistake finite things for reality. The earth has laid hold upon me. I understand now the greed wherewith men have clutched

and held it, from earliest savage days to the Oklahoma scandals of land-grabbing. The curse of property has descended upon me; the selfishness of the landed gentry which I have so scorned as I have driven past high English walls, set with jagged glass, is no longer unintelligible to me. My pleasure in touching my small bit of land betrays me akin to those I have censured. I could put an English county into my pocket! Remembering the vast acres of Sherwood Forest, at present ironically embodied in the "dukeries", I wonder whether I should now, as always of yore, be on Robin Hood's side. There is strange delight in standing upon your own plot of ground; I color with displeasure when an unfriendly foot is put upon it. In moments of compunction I realize how fully it possesses me, instead of my possessing it, and I become, for a mood or so, converted to the doctrines of Henry George, not because ownership of land is unfair to other men, but because it is unfair to one's self. I grow limited, selfish. One not good at bargains might as readily change

his inner self for a hundred and twenty foot lot as for the whole world, perhaps.

Real estate! There is the house and all the to-do of building it. For months my soul has gone howling in a wilderness of things. It has been as if, for an awful season, the world of the materialists had come true, and there existed only a universe of objects, hard, tangible, impenetrable. Even the sense that my own fierce resentment disproves such a theory, that I could not so rebel if there existed nothing but length and breadth and height, does not do away with a dismayed feeling that it is so. My universe is bounded by a long tape-measure; my mind is a mere wood-pile, a brick heap, a collection of paint-pots. I used to think that within me dwelt an immortal spirit — they taught me this when I was young; nothing dwells there now save bath-tubs and fire-places and dormer-windows. A quick, electric flash of thought used sometimes to thrill through me; now, idea meets idea as wood knocks on wood, and my thoughts jangle one on another like our new hardware. I am

oppressed by fears of flood and fire, and of thieves that may break in and steal. I, who worry about the silver, never used to worry lest some one had stolen my aspirations. My hopes were burglar-proof; my thoughts where moth and rust do not corrupt. Busy all my life with airy nothingnesses, from the point of view of the real estate agent, with the eternal verities, from my own point of view, I count over my increasing material possessions with an increasing sense of loss. We are insured from injury by fire, but who can insure the middle-aged from the loss of their ideals?

II

For it is not only my anxieties but my content that alarms me. There are moments when I look at this little white house, child of so many sleepless nights and haggard days, with a feeling that desire could go no farther. It fills up the measure of my affection; it is just as high as my heart. If, following the suggestion of Queen Mary, you should open this organ, you would find engraved there not

"Calais", but "pergola." I might add that a short grass path leads to it from the butler's pantry door, and that we mean to dine there on spring evenings, while the hylas call from the brookside below, and on late autumn afternoons, while crickets chirp near by. At times I struggle with a sudden sense of limitation; my soul used to be more than thirty-eight by thirty-two! I would rather have it back. I was not in the old days walled about and roofed in. Now I have but windows and a skylight through which I can see, faint and far, a few of the stars that used to seem so near above my wandering head.

But, more than in the house, in yard and garden I batten on a low content. As I work, upon my knees — a posture that once, alas! served other ends — my hands touching the cool, crumbling clods, I can feel all my inner self creeping down in roots and fibres, changing into those small seed grains and bulbs that will quicken into the misty blue of the delphiniums, the pale gold of the iris. The curving gray walk shuts off all glimpse of the far trails on the

heavenly hills; the ripple of the birch leaves, the hum of the bees, keep all more distant music from my ears; the oriole wins me from desire to hear the angels sing; subtle, penetrating fragrances from fern and grass and clove pinks close the door to that inmost me where thought and aspiration used sometimes to enter hand in hand. Now come only dim wonderings, as I watch the sunlight, golden-green through grape-vine leaves: has the soul color? Will anything beyond make good the loss of the touch on cheek and nostril of the deep-red rose that bends above my work? Earth to earth — will going back to the great all-mother be a wholly pleasant feeling, like this?

From such moods I waken with a start, tugging at my chain of sense, conscious of a lost domain. Where are my old sympathies, and the remembered wrongs that were not mine? At moments I cease to mourn, among these fragrances, for St. Bartholomew and the burning of the Slocum, for the hurt of suffering children and maimed animals. In this insidious content I lose myself and the only real me, that

desire to know all and share all, which is the seed of immortality. I rise in quick resolve. Grass shall no longer grow through the inner part of me. I will not barter my kingdom of the air for a mess of dirt, however full at times of that wet fragrance that takes me back to my earth-worm days. It is dragging me down, this bit of earth, to what I was before my soul was born, when yet I wriggled through moist, reedy things, in the grateful coolness of mud. The grain of dust wherewith one starts, the six feet one needs at the last, are all the real estate that one may claim. I will arise and sell my plot of ground, and put the gold-pieces in my pocket, for mine and others' use. The endless road for me!

OUR NEAREST, — AND FARTHEST, — NEIGHBORS

I

Our nearest neighbors stand a bit aloof, and do not visit us except for the briefest stay. Newcomers, we are somewhat hurt; peering out of the corners of our windows we watch and wait, as silent, as motionless as they when they watch us, and still they pass us by. It is true that we have forced our way into an old community, and have broken soil among the undisturbed trees on a green hillside still clothed in the primeval grass of the wilderness. Those earlier settlers, the meadow-larks, have perhaps a right to complain of our intrusion. Complain they do, their notes of gentle protest coming early in the spring, and sounding on through warm summer days to autumn. What has gone wrong with their housekeeping, I

wonder, that they so persistently lament? Certainly we have not disturbed the homes of their building, and are ready to go more than half way in making friends.

As I see, though pretending not to look, the bright, untrusting eyes that watch us from adjacent trees, as I hear swift wings beating retreat, I marvel that they do such scanty justice to our good intent. Is it because of our coming that the mourning dove so mourns? Do they not like our way of housekeeping? It is as careful, as methodical, as industrious as their own. It is, moreover, as old-fashioned, for we like ancestral ways, and are averse to the new-fangled devices of the ladies' journals, — oh, horror of pink teas and lavender luncheons! And we share their woodland tastes: one doorway opens on a hillside with a wood beyond, the other upon what the English would call a copse.

It cannot be our clothes that they object to, for our modest greens and browns are as unobtrusive as the wear of any bird or squirrel of them all. Indeed, I should not think of

going abroad in the colors that certain of them wear, — scarlet, or vivid blue, or brilliant orange, — for even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like some of these. Perhaps they do not like the company we keep, yet our one meek gray cat who strolls with us in the evening coolness on hillside or by garden path would not hurt them; only, at sight of them, an impotent lashing of the tail and a faint, queer snarl recall his far-off savage ancestry. It seems perfectly automatic and unconscious, and is certainly incongruous in the presence of the Christian virtues which that cat has acquired from us. *He* is not proud and unfriendly, but is willing to go as far as his four paws can carry him across that space which separates even the friendliest beasts from their distant human kin.

II

We have courted our new neighbors with crumbs in winter-time; we have courted them in April with string laid out enticingly on the grass, as the starting-point of home; we have

tied suet to the trees in snowy weather, and have maintained luncheon counters of nuts and of wheat; we have, quite in the prevailing fashion in social service, established a public bath. All these favors they have accepted, with mental reservations, on tip-toe for flight, a-wing at first sight of us. We have even established model tenements; well-lighted, well-ventilated residences are offered rent free. Some of them were fashioned of cigar-boxes, some of grape-baskets; all were covered with birch-bark to match the trees on which they hang. Yet the blue-birds pass by the homes intended especially for them, and the wren-house, made with the exact size of doorway that the bird book prescribed for the least of sweet singers of Christendom, has never lured the longed-for tenant to our eaves.

To that cold table, winter-set, come jays and juncoes and chickadees. I find on the porch-roof in the new-fallen snow innumerable little footprints of the latter, or see in the morning sunshine a whole white and gray flock feeding like one, flying away like one, if I go

too near. I am always expecting the nuthatch, who feasts royally for one of his size, with a kind of Christmas gusto; but he has never accepted his invitation. When the sky is heavy with snow about to fall, I think often that perhaps he will come to-morrow, for, with the inhabitants of air as with the inhabitants of earth, necessity increases friendliness.

Regarding these, and our few other winter birds, meadow-larks, kinglets, brown creepers, I often wonder in what corners they cuddle, and whether snow, rightly used, makes a warm blanket. A yearning sense of hospitality in the stinging cold weather, a desire to share the warmth of the hearth with wee things shut outside, human or other, pauses here at the bounds that nature has set. That which one has to offer is not that which is needed; this puzzled wish to help is touched by the chill of philanthropy, and baffled by the lack of understanding that must exist between those who share no common threshold.

As for our most constant winter guest, the jay, I cannot accept the common scorn of him,

often shown by critics in reality no more generous than he. Wherein eating other birds' eggs differs from the methods commonly employed by the fittest in surviving, I have yet to see, and I watch him with the remote wonder wherewith, at a distance, I watch our predatory merchant-princes masquerading in the brilliant plumage of philanthropists. The jays have dash, presence; they lack scruple, and, with the loud platform manners, — for they seem always, through their shrill cries, to be addressing an audience, — they are curiously akin to others successful in business and in public life. I am told that the jay behaves better at home than when he is away, and I respect him for that he reverses the practice of many, and forgive him for his noise in my yard, knowing that he is silent in his own doorway. I could forgive him much, too, for the beauty of his outstretched wings against the world of winter white and the white birch trunks. Often, on the coldest days, his tap-tapping at the hard suet wakens me; from porch railing or branch of tree he watches me,

his head cocked on one side, with a judicious and critical expression, and I feel, as I watch him in return, that no creature more mentally alert crosses our domain on feathers or on feet. Yet he lacks something — shall I call it imaginative vision? — that impels other birds to seek far shores and new horizons, in unceasing quest.

III

A family of wee field sparrows have a doorway very near our own, snuggling down under a shaggy thatch of brown grass like English cottagers. Most neighborly, of course, are the robins; and on July mornings troops of spotted-breasted birdlings cross our lawn, each headed by that model father red-breast, who, as I am told, takes charge of the early brood while the mother-bird is hatching out the second, roosts with them by night among the trees, and by day teaches them the lore of robin life. The small, low branches of the birch trees are evidently excellent for the robin kindergarten held here, and I can bear witness

to the thoroughness of the pedagogical methods, if any aërial agency requires testimonials. Flying lessons, swimming lessons, foraging lessons go on incessantly, and all day long they search for worms. Once, when I thought of adopting a young robin that had fallen out of the nest, a scientist told me that it would require twelve feet of worms in twelve hours, and I desisted. It is fortunate that my own students have no such appetites! The young things trail solemnly around after their parent, two or three at a time, like chickens; if his head turns but for an instant, beaks fly wide open, as if moved by springs. It is a pretty sight to see the deftness wherewith he drops in a worm, the young one squatting on the grass, or waiting on a twig, and swallowing the booty before the old bird has even ceased flying. The kindergarten has always seemed to me questionable in rendering the child too passive, and I have my doubts about this. Surely these fat babies could bestir themselves a little sooner! Though a "mere picker up of learning's crumbs", with only intellectual rela-

tions with the young, I cannot help being absurdly pleased when I see these birdlings begin to find bits for themselves.

In the flying lessons more independence is insisted upon from the first, and the notes wherewith the nestlings are urged from branch to empty air are sharp, incisive, and full of anxiety. More coaxing tones lure them to the bird bath in the shallow terra-cotta basin on the lawn, and here they are shown how to dip and spatter the water with fluttering wings, and how to dry their feathers afterward. I saw an old bird teaching three at a time one day, and then shooing them out one by one when the bath was over. Later, one of the young ones went back, once, twice, three times, and stood shivering on the brink, afraid to plunge, for all the world like a ridiculous baby.

These marvelously competent creatures converse with their young with a wide range of notes, and ward off from them the very appearance of danger, valiantly fighting away the jays, and ordering me to take in the cat if he put but the tip of his gray nose outside

the door. Expert parents, entirely taken up with the diet and the physical education of their progeny, they seem, more than most birds, to belong to our era, and I think of them as better able to cope with the ideals of our present civilization than are many of our songsters. Their cheerful, bustling materialism, their content in unflagging search for the necessary worm, strike one as distinctly contemporary. Like the jays in their alert practicality, they fail like them in that charm of elusiveness and mystery that we associate with winged things, yet they have that fundamental idealism that dares all and enlists all in the defence of home. The year after the great war began a blue-jay attacked a robin's nest in a near-by maple tree; the robins, aided by other robins, fought fiercely, and at length the jay took refuge in our birches. Here the defenders were joined by a pair of cat-birds, two orioles, and a pair of red-winged blackbirds. Together the allies drove away the marauder, — a prophetic battle, we trust.

IV

Watching and waiting, we get glimpses of the many-sided neighborhood life about us, even of creatures more exclusive than robins. The oldest inhabitants, the crows, are always with us, slowly moving on black wings against gray clouds of winter, or congregating among sunlit pine branches in July. At the first touch of warmer sun, the first deeper blue in the February sky, they are astir; what significance has this busy and systematic flying, with loud caws, back and forth along the line of trees that border the stream? What do they discuss, what plans do they make, when they gather in vast numbers in the tree tops? Although distant, I half overhear debates that sound far more interesting and important than those which it is my duty to attend; opinions are uttered with more conviction, an energy of rough speech that will not be denied. The assembly would seem to be appointing committees to act with power, then suddenly to resolve itself, with outstretched wings, into a committee of the whole.

I have always had a special admiration for these neighbors who watch, with apparent disdain, generations of mere human life, and a special curiosity in regard to what they know. Harsh oracles of primeval speech issue from their throats as we draw near, but they will not admit us to their councils; and the way in which they watch our approach, slowly make up their minds in our disfavor, and fly deliberately away, is more insulting than sudden terror. I am told that their success in life is largely due to the coöperative, highly organized thieving, as yet undisturbed by any anti-trust law, and that the social instinct is in them very fully developed. What care I how social they be, if they are so unsociable with me? Some of the subtleties of their deep knowledge have been made known, but more are as yet unfathomed. Timeless, they dwell in immemorial mystery, and have solemn associations with long-forgotten sunrises and sunsets. A sombre significance clings to them, different from that attaching to any other feathered things, sombre but not malign. Yet

when, a day or two ago, a huge crow flew so close to the window where I was watching that I could have touched him, for a pagan moment I shrank, for he was as a mythological creature out of an elder world, and I seemed to see my doom descending on black, slow-beating wings. For the most part, however, though these neighbors stand aloof and hold me in deserved contempt, I count them friends, and find little in the world more expressive than they, flapping their way over distant fields and cawing I know not what ancient wisdom. A single crow in the gathering twilight, flying toward the darkening wood, has a look of going straight to the central mystery of things, and in him I seem to see

"The last bird fly into the last light."

Nearer our human comprehension are the red-winged blackbirds, in whom we take great delight, with their fascinating housekeeping among the long swamp-grasses and reeds, through which a many-branched stream threads its wet way. Blue flag flowers grow here, tall cat-tails and rushes; something — perhaps

the way of the stream with the grasses, the moist fragrance of it all, the gurgle of the water among the lily-pads, or the meeting of the sloping meadow beyond with the wood — brings an encompassing sense of shelter, of comfort, and of home. The blackbirds come early, with the first faint green in the hidden hollows of the surrounding hills; they call over bare, brown meadows where only close-watching eyes could see spring. As the marsh begins to turn green, and roots quicken, they build and sing, making their nests by the water-side, many near together in pleasant comradeship; more and more protected as the grasses grow tall and create, with their feathery green heads and deeper green of the blades, an exquisite shelter of delicate shades and gradations.

These builders in the shadow and the sun have a poetry of note and of motion that the robins lack; whistling, chuckling softly, they sink, with what loveliness of flight! low, low to their nests in the reeds. The protectiveness of the parent wings, the little answering peep from the nest, are as something remem-

bered from lullaby times of long ago. Not because of any overtures from them, for they fly swiftly, with menacing wings, toward us if we venture too near, writing "thus far and no farther" upon the twilight air, we count them among our most prized companions, and again and again go reluctantly from these red-and-black-clad neighbors who do not call, to put on polite attire and walk sedately down the village street, making belated visits to those justly irate human neighbors, who called so long ago! Near of kin these winged things seem, though separated far in the world of physical being, in their jealous guarding of the threshold, their deep sense of the inviolability of home. Through the last days of wind and snow we watch and wait for them, and each succeeding summer the greater is our loneliness when they are gone and there are no more brave wings with touches of red against the sky above the sunken meadow. Something of the sense of loss of vanished human companionship attends our autumn walks near these "fledged birds' nests" whence the birds

have flown; alas for these old friends, and the white stretches of winter silence that they leave behind them!

V

It is with me in regard to birds as in regard to people: I have no desire to know all, nor do I wish to catalogue the entire species, but I sorely covet friendly intimacy with a few. In both cases I have a pleasant acquaintance with some whose names I do not know. With the flicker that I find clinging to my screen in the morning, — having heard his knocking at my window, dimly, through waking and dreams, — in all the brave beauty of his brown-spotted, creamy breast and his red crown, I would fain have further intercourse, but his quick wings will not so. I could "desire of more acquaintance", too, with the evening grosbeak, who, despite his name, called at nine o'clock one stormy March morning, then flew away forever.

I want to know, but never shall, the little screech owl, whose cry, most significant and

characteristic, shrill, sweet, and weird, sounds out from the near-by wood and now and then from our own trees. I hold my breath when, lying in bed, I hear him, and, even in the dark, I see him clearly, yet not him. Long, long ago a kind friend caught one and gave him to me; tame him I could not; he only stared at me with big, unseeing eyes, and refused to swallow the food placed in his beak. At last I let him go, perhaps untactfully, in the day-time,

"Blind, and in all the loneliness of wings."

Gossip has told me about his housekeeping: how he is thrifty, forages in winter and stores up in a hollow tree mice and other prey enough for a week's housekeeping. When my own goes wrong I sometimes wish that I could go and board with the little owl.

I should like to be admitted to further intimacy with these feathered folk, but perhaps they are right in holding me, if not at arms' length, at wings' length, and the wings' length of a suddenly startled bird is something to marvel at. Their wisdom I envy, their sky

wisdom and earth wisdom, their exquisite skill in building, their canny household ways. Even through the slight intercourse which they permit us, marvellously they enrich our lives, as contact with other life inevitably must, not only through this sense of fellowship in home-building and home-keeping, but through the endless charm of music, and motion, and color.

In spring the song of the oriole, unbelievably beautiful; comes from trees near by, but he never builds close enough. Venturing near human habitations, he still jealously guards his seclusion. Though he refuses our proffered string, he sings to us, often pouring out his heart among our trees; then, a swift, red-golden flash, so swift that the swaying birch-leaves seem to go too, and he is away toward home. He lives in the huge, stately elm at the corner, disdaining lesser residences, and I can hear his song, fainter but not less appealing, from his own doorway. His brother builds in another elm, farther along the busy highway, singing high and unafraid above the puffing

automobiles and the creaking carts; and surely it is a near relative who has his home in a clump of tall green trees on the greener hillside. There he sings, high and sweet, the morning long. Toiling over books and papers, I can hear him, and the "God-intoxicated" bobolink who lives in the meadow below the hill. Together they bring back always the story of the two nightingales, those symbolic nightingales who sang from the laburnum to the young Robert Browning after that day of days when he had first opened his Shelley and his Keats, — too great an intellectual and spiritual experience for a single day of boyhood, one would think, even for that robust poetic vitality.

The long elm-branches toss in the wind, yet the swaying nest is always safe. On sunshiny days there are such trills of pure and varied melody that I cannot work, — for oh, how he sings one's childhood back! The music flows across the silences as through the discords of the days; surely the oriole has found some inner soul of melody in all things!

The bobolink keeps house in the meadow-

grass by the stream just over the fence from the highway. I know where it is, though he does not think I know, having taken pains to alight, singing his maddest, on reeds and grasses far away, and distinctly on my path toward home. I have not called on him, and shall not, for I too have my reserves. His choice of a home shows that he has learned something of the hard wisdom of the world. Last year he had a devastated threshold, for the mowing machine went ruthlessly over that loveliest spot of waving meadow-grass where he had built. This year he has chosen a place where the swamp-grasses are never touched by the mowers' knives; surely I am right in thinking he is the same, our neighbor of last year, though I cannot be sure, for there is always a certain family likeness in the voice.

Some relatives of his, who live a mile or two farther, came before he did, on a green May day. I go often to hear them, for, as they sing, one and then another, in that little colony of songsters, they bring back all the vanished Junes, with their wild strawberries and their

fragrant hay. Yet, as I stroll along the highway toward home in the perfectness of this special June, I am glad to hear my own near neighbor again, and to watch his rapturous flight upward, with lyric trills of song, and his dropping low to grass or reed, where he sways back and forth in the breeze. It seems to me that there is an added madness of assurance in his melodies this summer as he sings on, unafraid, that all's right with the world; and I hold my breath, with a touch of the old Greek apprehension of swift turn of fate after too perfect moments. Are he and Robert Browning a trifle oversure?

VI

Many are the birds that charm us by beauty of color and of song; there are others that compel our eyes primarily through sheer beauty of motion. Such are the wide-winged gulls at the not-distant New England shore, with the slow and stately rhythm of their white wings; such are the eagles that I remember from long ago circling majestically against a clear blue

sky about the high gray cliffs of Mount Parnassus; such are swallows of every kind. Bank swallows live near us, the top of certain high sand-cliffs being pierced all along its edge by their mysterious, enticing thresholds that one may not cross. Great delicacy and reserve of demeanor is necessary in approaching them, for they are careful of the company they keep. This year they made no holes in one sand-cliff where, last year, many of them dwelt, — a mystery of choice to us until we saw the kingfisher's nest hollowed out there, and remembered the grim look of the kingfisher with his fierce crest, on a limb by the water, watching for his prey. About our roof these swallows circle in the open sky at eventide against the sunset clouds; they fly low before the coming rain, low and higher, swaying, swinging, dipping in joyousness of motion and grace of untrammelled flight. The little call of the swallow, what is it, — thanks for the insect just caught, or greeting to neighbor swallow, as they pass and repass in the oncoming twilight, like "ships that pass in the night"?

Color and grace of motion together make up the loveliness of the blue-bird's flight. These gentle creatures light on branch and twig about us in earliest spring, pair by pair, in radiance of blue raiment against a paler sky, while we go on tip-toe, lest we frighten them away. As they sit with their wise little heads on one side, considering, we wonder anxiously whether they will find us unworthy of the close companionship of adjacent homes. Long ago a pair of them nested in a hollow apple tree near our old doorway, and successive families have occupied birch bark houses near the new, their songs encircling the house with melody, a little ripple here, a ripple there, surely the sweetest note in nature. I should rather have the grace of such companioning than any other household boon, but often I ask in vain. Many call in early autumn to say good-by, punctilious and yet distant. A few days ago, in late summer, the yard was full of them, parents and children; some, full blue with soft, bright breasts, others, evidently fuzzy youngsters, with wings just growing blue. Their

little chirp sounded from among the birches and the wild-cherry tree in most companionable fashion, and yet they fled, parent and children, across the browning grass, leaving us to the yellowing leaf and the cricket's chirp, and the mellow loneliness of autumn.

Other bird friends we have, and many. The little song sparrow makes music for us in all seasons, in all weathers, even sometimes through a sleepy snatch of song at night. The vesper sparrow greets us on the close-shorn hills to westward when we walk there at sunset; and on summer afternoons, from the shady coverts of the adjacent wood, comes the full golden melody of the wood thrush, with that liquid tone which only thrushes give. I have listened, but listened in vain hereabout, for the high, celestial note of the hermit, but he does not venture so near, inhabiting some far region between us and the heavenly hills.

Greatest of all privileges is the charm of the minor snatches of song, the momentary glimpses

of wings, often of visitors we do not know, and yet half understand; — we are wayfarers all! A red-breasted grosbeak comes to chat in friendly fashion among the twigs, then flits away to his undiscovered threshold. A humming-bird calls now and then for a minute at the threshold of larkspur or columbine; his lichen-covered home I can imagine, though I have no skill to follow his swift flight. The goldfinch means a gleam of celestial beauty, as does the yellow warbler; and there was one wonderful minute when a scarlet tanager paused in a birch, the sunshine falling on his bright body through the translucent leaves.

VII

These and other winged visitants we have, in wavering flight or sure, now high, now low, drifting past birch leaf and hollyhock, shining visitants, with the swift splendor of sunlight on wings of blue or red or gold, making us wonder why a pallid modern imagination clothes angels all in white. The old painters knew better, and on Italian canvases and walls one may see

wings of green and azure, splendid pinions of celestial creatures wearing gorgeous markings of moth and of butterfly. Oftentimes quick wings pass, of we know not what, above pergola or sky-light; swift, nameless shadows float over yonder waving green meadow; a sound of wings reaches our ears though we do not lift our eyes. In their very elusiveness lies the deepest appeal of this people of the air; the sordid philosopher who said that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush was as grossly mistaken as his kind are wont to be, for a bird in the bush is worth twenty times twenty in the hand. When was anything worth having ever capable of being held in the hand?

The nearest, yet the farthest, of our neighbors, one feels a wistful sense of kinship with them, and yet, — the distances! Wordsworth's

> "Stay near me — do not take thy flight!
> A little longer stay in sight!"

in his poem to a butterfly suggests something of the baffled longing for companionship that marks our intercourse with winged creatures. They only, of all living things, know to the

full this migratory instinct that lies deep in human nature, the need of new horizons, the deep recurrent stirring at the heart in spring. They flit on the edges of our humanness, akin, yet not near of kin, piquing our desire, quickening our sense of wonder. One watches them with dim understanding, and with unconfessed or unrealized envy.

Of all creatures they are the least bound in the chain of things, with their brief term of earthly ownership, watching their nests for a single season and then away, not clogged and hampered by property rights, whether of real estate, or of heavy flesh and bone. Are not their bones filled with air? Free of the universe are they, unencumbered for the long trail, just this side of being pure spirit. Theirs is the charm of that which comes but in moments, and which you may not keep; about a home, which stands for the settled and permanent, lies this haunting mystery of wings that come and go between us and the sky. They touch the soul within us, quicken the sense of quest, for each beat of these encom-

passing wings stirs something deep within. They make us aware of far spaces, of distance, freedom, mystery, infinity, — of a sky for the human spirit to circle in, even now, even now!

PLAIN COUNTRY

I

LIKE many another person of the present day I have, from time to time, travelled as far as my means would permit — and a little farther — exploring countries new and strange, or new and strange to me, climbing high mountains, sailing broad seas, and making the acquaintance of coasts as full of wonder and of mystery, swept by the wings of gulls, washed by green waves, as were the far shores of Odysseus's wide adventure to Odysseus. And I have had huge enjoyment in it all, standing to watch, at distant corners of the earth, the pageant of wind and wave and cloud, trudging up unknown hills in a fine mood of adventure, driving across mountain passes into countries as fresh and as enchanting as if they had been created overnight to meet this fresh sense of quest.

Yet sometimes, and oftentimes, I realize that no strange shore or wonderful mountain range has brought a sense of pleasure quite so deep as that which comes at moments in mere country, the plain country of the land of home. I do not mean any of the show regions of America — the glories of the Canadian Rockies, or the wonders of the Yosemite. I mean the common country of old-fashioned fences and winding roads, where tangles of alder and of sumac cluster by the gray rails or grayer stone — common country, where the hay grows long in June, and the woods creep close to the hayfields, and a little stream, perhaps, goes threading its way softly between the grasses.

Here is no sense of effort in your enjoyment; all is near and dear, familiar, perhaps for generations a part of your forefathers' lives. There is no need to try your eyes to take in the meaning of jagged rock outlines and heaped earth masses, or stretches of desert sand. You have not purchased an expensive ticket whose worth, to the uttermost penny, must be extracted, from the panorama before you, making you

study it anxiously, eager to do your duty by every shade and outline. You do not have to strain to the sublime, as you do when confronted by Scenery, capitalized scenery — capitalized in every sense of the word; you do but sit quietly upon some green bank, full of unforced pleasure that hardly names itself pleasure, so unconscious it is. Ah, the relief of the encompassing leafy greenness to eyes tired by the glare of rock and sand, the exhausting glory of the shore; the rest, in shorn green meadow, of muscles wearied by climbing rugged mountain faces!

II

We are up and away nowadays, speeding fast for change; yet in meadows near my own doorway I have learned more of the limitless variety of nature than I have learned in following marvels very far. The trees that I know best are never twice the same, because of the way of the wind with their leaves, of the sun upon them, of their noonday shining and their evening shadow. Can the sea with its

waves give more of change than a June meadow of long grass, where the wind has its way through a long afternoon? Where can you find beauty that will surpass these green waves, rising, falling, breaking, strewn with blossoms of buttercup, daisy, and red clover? The salt ocean has no such fragrance as that which comes from hay and clover and sweet grass newly shorn. Have you ever watched the winds and tides in fields of wheat and rye, the long golden waves, the swift shadow of bird-wings across them, and, just above, against the sky, slow-sailing white clouds that drift and drift in summer seas of dim blue haze?

Does it not stand to reason that you will see more of endless process if you stay quiet for a bit and contemplate the endless variety of familiar things than if you shift every minute your point of view, never looking the same way twice? If you want to see the great procession, wait and do not join it; as a hurrying part of the pageant you miss the changefulness that comes to you, the rest that stays, satisfying that fixed and stable something with-

in, the permanent you. Wind, sun, and familiar water bring home the wonder and the mystery of change, when the great winds or the least winds are abroad in the branches and among the blossoms, and the play of light and shade makes quivering etchings of leaf and twig upon the grass. Falling showers, smitten by the sunlight, great rains that drench and flood, and the beauty of mists that come and go, shrouding familiar trees, torn by the wind, drifting to rest on far hills, are the heritage of him who will but stand and watch. The sublime treads your own pathway, bringing swift surprise, as, before a sudden storm, you watch peaceful cattle upon the quiet hillside, dreaming woods, wings sailing securely against the blue. Presto! the wind is abroad; startled cattle, snuffing; the look of the forest against the oncoming dark cloud, the white of shivering poplar and shaken aspen against the inky gray, the sharp lightning, bring home the wonder and the terror of the universe. Yet it is as awful in moments of quiet sunshine, did we but realize it, as in moments of great crash;

nor can great upheavals, cataclysms, teach us more of endless change and process than can moth, dragon-fly, and butterfly, green insect wings or gray, aquiver over the earth.

Of the stream, brown and gold in the depths, change is as inexhaustible as of ocean, and nearer, sweeter, with all the little ways of leaping water, with sun-sparkles upon the stony bed between the rippling shadows of reed and marsh grass. So, too, is the way of the sun with the leaves through the long day in the forest — while, far and near, ferns catch the light, turn to pale-green flames in the dimness, and then go out. In the coolness, the mossy leafiness of common woodland on a common day, amid the rustling of ancient leaves under the soft murmur of the tree, one may find the magic of constantly shifting beauty, and with it the very heart of comfort and of peace.

III

But there are deeper changes whereby we share the inner life of nature, our pulses beating with her own, while glorying as spectators in

that outer beauty which marks the year's round of experience. Through that winter mood of waiting and suspense we dwell with the soul of mystery, even among familiar encompassing hills and meadows, while brooding thought and imagination are forever busy with knowledge withheld, locked in the grasp of the great frosty secret, until, with the first touch of thaw, there is quick change at the heart of life, the enigma, and soft relenting. At the flush of faint color over the topmost twigs of tree and shrub, and the breaking spray of pale new green upon the woodland seen through the radiant, shimmering air of spring, there are flashes of hope, and a feeling that one is about to know. Then follows the beauty that no tongue can tell of the coming of the leaves, tiny, vital, translucent in their myriad colors, and, in the dance of the least shadows on the grass and over sunlit water, we realize with a swelling sense of life that there still are young leaves and laughter in the world.

Spring, with its foreboding, expectant heart, and the bewildering beauty that cannot find

ways enough of expression, has a sting, a poignancy that no other season has; the faint, questioning loveliness, the timidly advancing, then apparently retreating footsteps are invitations, perhaps most fully understood at home, to share its troubled hopes, its fears for the light-hung nest, its anxious joyousness.

As outlines and colors deepen, and the misty sunlight of April slips into the assured sunshine of summer, we seem to be sharing an inner life and growth, and living at the heart of some inconceivably great, expanding, developing creature. Mown grass, fresh and falling; stacks of hay; fragrances blended and subtle of ripening things; wheat in windrows; wheat in golden sheaves; rustling leaves of growing corn share with us the warm satisfactions of summer; we flush with the harvest apple, and mature with pear and plum. Those chosen things that have stood the strain of living are growing ripe in warm sunshine; there are mellow moments of life triumphantly and deeply fulfilling itself. Here, in your own garden, in your own dooryard, the passing moments

bring home to you the culminating splendor and glory of the season's changes.

Later, crisp August days, with their crickets and pale stubble fields, bring the sweet security of autumn, full of a sense that uncertainties are over, and all false hopes forgotten. Past browning hillsides; past magic cornshocks in the rich sunshine, with pumpkins at their feet; past miles of regal, nodding goldenrod one wanders with longing to have change stop here forever in such fulfilment. The long wild grass burns deeper red; warm October glory is all about you; it brims the little valleys; it wanders on the hillsides.

Then comes the beauty that no tongue can tell of the falling of the leaves. Dusky red of oak, yellow of maple, the little twinkling golden leaves of birch, fall and float through the hazy air of days of dreamy sunshine and blue distance. All things far and near are blended in one soft glow of dim color; all bring a subtle invitation to perfect peace.

The wonderful hoar frosts that come with the sweet, sharp chill of later autumn, spar-

kling on twig and brown grass and on asters faded on their stalks, in all jewel colors, emerald, topaz, and transparent blue of aquamarines, slip imperceptibly into hoar frosts sparkling over new-fallen snow. It is winter again, with the play of snow-flakes with branch and twig, hemlock branches and birch tree tops bending under their feathery load; winter, with its fine sculptures on fence and roof, with the pure white curves of the hills, and the clear gold of sunset behind the branches and the trunks of the west woods.

Again comes that winter feeling of changelessness, denoting in reality the deepest change of all, as, with other dormant things, you await resurrection.

IV

So, forever at home in the very heart of change itself, you wander at will among things gentle and familiar, whose charm is best sought in near pathways on your own feet. Neither horse nor motor can climb the old rail fences, the old stone walls that you must climb to find

these haunts of ancient peace. The wood path, flecked with moss, the shadow of the leaves on the slender trail; the worn way across the old pasture, fern-beset, among the lichen-covered stones, — following such paths, while the wood-thrush is calling, calling, and the mellow notes float across the perfect afternoon, you find your way back to quiet moments, before "efficiency" came in, and war came back. Or you skirt the meadow in later afternoon, when the shadows creep farther and farther over the grass which grows cool about your feet as evening comes. It may be that a bobolink sings not far away, or a red-winged blackbird gives the soft home call from a bough above the marsh-grasses. Certain it is that soft summer sounds of life astir, growing softer and sweeter as the shadows deepen, come from among the grass and reeds, peeping, chirping, violin music of tiny wings. Swallows circle overhead where film of cloud, invisible before, turns delicate rose, trailing over half the heavens, and the moment brings a perception of perfect oneness with nature, a pro-

found sense of being at home. You snuggle down and tuck the horizon in about you, with all its soft clouds, and rest sweetly, if but through the sight of the eyes, in the hollow of the encompassing hills.

Here, come golden moments of pause and quiet, snatched from the strife of things. charmed moments of understanding the peace at nature's heart, mighty rest in mighty strife, It is in such instants of perception of a great pulse beating with your own that you remember nature as the old mother of us all, known in her homely ways and household activities, whispering sweet and comforting things in your ears, not the magnificent mother, source and grave of all things living, but the ancient singer of lullabies that lead to gentle dreams.

GARDENS, REAL AND IMAGINED

I

THERE is really no need for any one to write about gardens, — so much has already been written, so many wise folk, poets, philosophers, gardeners, have set forth in verse and in prose the charm of gardens, the plans of gardens, the symbolism of gardens, the needs of gardens. I grasp my pen tightly, turning back resolutely to culture of the mind, but the sweetest west wind of all the year, the wind of June, blows my papers away, and my bit of garden will not let me alone. Chasing my papers, I am compelled to stop to arrange a tendril about a cord, to free a struggling shoot of rose-bush, to pick rag-weed from out the forget-me-not bed, and one long grass stem from among the California poppies. My garden has a thousand feminine wiles for keeping

my mind upon itself, distracting ways of demanding attention, jealous lest it be forgotten for a moment.

It is not a respectable garden, like those of our neighbors, for we tamed a bit of the wilderness, and we keep it wild at the edges. On one side is a thicket of trees, where woodland things grow, ferns, moccasin plants, running pine, Solomon's seal, and a few shy wild flowers whose names we do not know. There is a little tangle where we coax sweet fern to life, and reluctant Scotch heather, resentful of our summer heat and homesick for its native mists; wild roses also, brought from the sea-shore; least pines and cedars, gathered by the wayside and in woods. Here, and in the untilled spaces about us, through the wilderness grass we sow golden-rod, asters, and daisies, and other vagrant things.

Our garden, to tell the truth, is somewhat undefined; it is hard to tell the garden from the yard, the yard from the wilderness. The bad habit of planting things in the grass has grown upon us, making increasing difficulty

for the man with the lawn-mower in distinguishing the desert from the sown. Mowing day is a day of many a gallant dash to rescue some shrinking green thing from the unregarding knives; and the big Irishman, rubbing his forehead in perplexity when he finds a huge bit of ragweed or a stray mullein, calls out despairingly: "Lady, did you plant that?" Even so, he guillotined a choice fern, some lady slippers, and two seedling birches. May the gods be kinder to him than he deserves, and spare his own red neck in time of peril!

But the charm of blossoming things growing out of the green needs no apology. Our crocuses wear a look, when, blue, white, or yellow, they open after the snow, as if God, and not a kind young friend, had planted them. Not all at once, but after long winter waiting, and early spring days of suspense lest frost has killed them, we year by year see "a crowd, a host of golden daffodils", not a marching host, but a straggling host, an hundred strong, here, there, everywhere, in and out among the white birches in the wakening green of

the grass. Ah, if the ghost of William Wordsworth would wander this way some sunny April day! One, by the south porch, comes long "before the swallow dares", and "takes the winds of March", and us, with beauty.

Our garden would never do as a basis of an article in a gardening book or a Lady's Magazine. It is not one of those methodical, unnatural gardens, where all the seeds that are sown germinate, where all bulbs and transplanted roots grow properly, where all blossoms turn out in expected colors, where a whole row of hollyhocks come up without gaps, with that false uniformity characteristic of handbooks. It is no placid spot, of gradual growth, but a thing of wild hopes and sudden fears, of quick inspirations unknown to the careful husbandman, unprophesied in the Farmer's Almanac; of hasty plantings, some of which prove fortunate, some lead to nothing; of surprising successes, of blasting defeats. It seems almost at times as if it too had fleet, imaginative glimpses of what might be, and shared our sense of triumph or mood of failure.

For nature is by no means the orderly, inch-by-inch personage we are taught in scientific text-books to think her. She also has her moments of inspiration, of rapid and luxuriant growth, and my garden makes me aware of her swift divinings, her blind hopes, her passionate impulses that wax and wane.

II

If it is the gardening of ignorance, at least it is full of the joy of discovery. To well-instructed friends I should be ashamed to confess that, busy for many years with mere books, ideas, intellectual apparatus, I knew not annuals from perennials. Biennials are still a puzzle; though I know the theoretical meaning well enough, I find it hard to discover the moment of bloom. When that guaranteed to flower every second year does not blossom at all, what are you to think of the book? Haunting problems perplex us. Were those bulbs that never came up planted upside down? Are they feeling their way China-ward? Has this ever happened with any of

those vital ideas which we have planted firmly, by the best pedagogical methods, in the mind of youth, and have never heard from afterward? Puzzles enough to make one lose one's wits spring up in one's own garden; there is no need to tramp the Andes nor traverse the rings of Saturn for nature's riddles to read.

Of our defeats, where are the hundred many-colored crocuses, planted in that mild November that led to the wickedest of cold winters? Where are the seven and twenty least pines, none more than six inches tall, that were to grow into a wild hedge, sweet smelling in the sun? There was a pathos about them as they perished in sleet and snow as of babies dying in this European war. Alas for my little field of wheat, one of the sudden inspirations, sown on the vacant lot, of wheat and scarlet poppies, scarlet English poppies, glowing in anticipation as they glow in memory from fields of Oxfordshire long ago! Burning heat and drouth withered the fresh young grain, and the poppies rested forever in poppy seed. One cries aloud for unachieved tulip, peony,

roses, full of a sense of pathos in "all things sown and mown"! Yet, after all, perhaps it is from the flowers that never grow that one has the greatest delight, those that one sees with the mind's eye, yet to be, lovely in line and in color, those that, in fancy, send out odors more appealing than we find when reality cheats us of the fairness of the vision. The "prophetic soul", dreaming on flowers to come, blends remembered beauty with the hope of future perfectness.

With the quiver of life about us in tendril and shining leaf, our present joy in growing things grows deeper, as colors and fragrances of our actual garden blend with colors and fragrances from long ago. Woodbine over the rafters takes on the semblance of *la petite chambre verte* in Normandy where we lunched one September noon, many years gone by, French grace of phrase and skill in cookery lending a charm to the rudest of arbors, the simplest of omelettes, the whitest crisp bread in all the world, the most ascetic of red wines. Do those vines too turn to glorified scarlet

in October frost, or has the little green chamber turned a more awful red in that great fighting line? In April the clear crimson of our tulips brings back those plucked wild in March on hills near Florence in long-vanished spring sunshine; and the little pink-tipped daisies that border the bed make one see again those in Alpine grass, high on the great slopes above Lausanne, with the glory of the lake, and Savoy, and Mont Blanc spread out before; those in English meadows in sweet, chill early summer. What subtle associations come on the breath of lilacs, of lilies-of-the-valley, of a few sprigs of blossoming heliotrope, recalling an almost tropical riot of color in a great bed of heliotrope on the shore of Lake Como, with every soft shade of lavender, deepening to richest purple, and a cloud of many-tinted purple butterflies hovering above!

III

It is but a step from that bed to the paths of the villa garden in which it grew; and so I tread again in memory stately Italian gardens

by the Tiber, luxuriant gardens by the Italian lakes; and Rome, Tivoli, Frascati, Val D'Arno come back in memory with perpetual freshness in their sound of running water, their brimming fountains in the cool shade of ilex trees. One, near Florence, I had, seemingly, all to myself in a fortnight of convalescence. Here were gravelled paths, where grass straggled beyond the edges; here neglected roses grow in loveliness over crumbling walls of pale yellow. There, evening by evening, a nightingale sang, and the little owl that says "Q", the owl that Shelley loved, came night by night. So, these humble paths of my garden, which are hardly paths at all, lead into greater; unforgotten gardens come back in sound, color, fragrance, and these slip into the gardens of history, poetry, story, — all because of this wayward bit of earth, at which I gaze in pride of possession, a "poor thing, yet my own."

I like to see, in fancy, tall lilies growing in the garden of Boccaccio, — so much of whiteness, of purity, in that doubly-tainted

atmosphere! My weeding goes oftentimes to the measure of Morris' lines:

> "I know a little garden close
> Set thick with lily and red rose
> Where I would wander, if I might,
> From dewy dawn to dewy night,
> And have one with me wandering."

Digging with a trowel, sometimes I touch the brown earth, questioning if it is real, as Swinburne's verses sing to me:

> "In a coign of a cliff between lowland and highland,
> At the sea-down's edge between windward and lee,
> Walled round with rocks as an inland island,
> The ghost of a garden fronts the sea."

But there is a better refuge still when all goes wrong with the tilled garden, when you cannot keep pace with the weeds, or when you pull up by mistake cherished plants; when many waterings fail. Moments come when, impatient of ownership and of responsibility, you run away to wood or to meadow. Our garden extends to the grass and the goldenrod growing on the hillside, the blue asters by the way, the yellowing fern in the woodland. Many are the hidden garden paths, green-

grown with moss, or brown with autumn leaves, where we venture reverently in the cool of the day, not touching leaf or flower. Here the first fernlets uncurl in the spring, and hepatica and anemone open in the wind. In such hidden sanctuary one wins escape from worry, and recognizes anew, through the silences and the murmur of the leaves, that the burden of this blundering universe is the Creator's, not one's own.

IV

Greater than the joy of memory, and of story or verse, is the joy of the present moment, when one seems to put down roots, to put out tendrils with one's growing things, and finds an absolute content in coming alive with one's garden. If some of our hopes have withered, on the other hand, many have come to happy maturity, sharing with us their summer glory. What could be more responsive than our vines, honeysuckle, ampelopsis, bitter-sweet, actinidias, wistarias, and those tangled woodbines transplanted from the thicket and run-

ning riot over porch and roof? With Lamb, one quotes over and over Marvell's

"Curl me about, ye gadding vines,"

as one goes on, tying a tendril here, loosing one there, in the constant vine-pedagogy needed by these impulsive things, so swift to put out unnumbered shoots, so slow in finding something to cling to, so piteously at the mercy of the wind.

Our lilács and syringas grow apace; Lombardy and Carolina poplars flourish at the edge, with little leaves that make a rippling noise in the wind, as of pattering rain. Royal golden tulips, pure gold even at the heart, deign to give us of their magnificence; larkspur, with its hint of distance, blossoms in misty blue; hollyhocks, all arow, as befits an old-fashioned front door, grow tall and flower in "wind-dark" red, in gold, in white, in soft-roseate colors. Foxglove invitingly swings its bells for wandering bees; and climbing roses, red and pink, climb and blossom, blossom and climb, almost wantonly, catching at rafter

and cord with strong tendrils; grape-vines hang clusters against our white pillars, with soft bloom of purple under the sheltering green. Iris grows in the mid-tangle and about the bird-bath, tall and protecting; and white madonna lilies bring the silence of perfect beauty to summer afternoons.

Here are fragrances that create Oriental moments in hard-working New England days: the old-fashioned honeysuckle, our joy and pride, over the pergola; quaint pinks from old-time gardens; delicate columbine; roses, roses, thyme; a little veering of the wind and it is the breath of the sweet-briar that comes; then the wild-wood odor of fern, moss, and pine, and an oozy meadow-smell from the tangle. On a hot, hot day, gathering moisture of coming rain draws forth latent fragrance, as soft clouds drift near. Moments of sweetness come in sultry midsummer noons and in the coolness of twilight; from the swift spattering of summer rain upon the earth; and from charméd afternoons of autumn when mellow sunshine falls upon ripening grapes.

V

A garden deepens your sense of friendliness with the whole green earth, and is, moreover, a great promoter of good-fellowship with human-kind; the friendships that you make over your garden have sweetness and enduring roots. What generosities grow in gardens! What interchange of blossom and fragrance! Old friends bring you bulbs and roots, so that you have something of them growing green beside you; new friends come, bearing gifts of seed and stalk. I try vainly to tell off on my fingers the kindly thoughts of others that have taken root and blossomed within me: one gave me blue iris; one yellow pansies for the grave of a four-footed friend; one hepaticas for the thicket; another, lilies of the valley and columbine; another, violets, blue and white. The sweet, old-fashioned pinks, the older-fashioned thyme, the deepest red hollyhocks came from the most lovely little old lady the world has ever known. Friends steal in with trowels, and plant for us, God knows what, God knows where! I

come home dragging a market basket filled to overflowing by the autumn generosity of a neighbor; rich in hollyhock plants, lilies, dahlias, chrysanthemums, — so heavy that I have to sit down on the old stone wall to rest. Here I open a little packet of seed, — an odd little white flower, he told me, like a forget-me-not, from the Pope's garden in Rome. I have since sowed it, breathing a prayer over my stubborn Protestant soil that the world may not forget him, Pius Tenth, for we have need of such as he!

So one reaches the hand of fellowship among the blossoms, and flower roots and deeper roots grow down into the soul together; the fellowship of human kind and flower kind are one. Back of each blossom I see the friendly face of the giver, and, if the friendly faces grow fewer as one grows older, one but values them the more.

Nor do our lesser comrades lack welcome here. Little toads hop in and out among the green stalks, pausing sometimes to have their backs stroked by a straw; squirrels

chatter in neighborly fashion from the trees; we are not altogether inhospitable to that uninvited guest, our neighbor's quacking hen, which renders us a rough version of *The Lotus Eaters* at hot noontides. Birds come and go; we are never without the companionship of wings, swift or slow. Bumble-bees visit foxglove and rose; humming-birds and butterflies blossom there; and day by day the honeysuckle pastures the village honey bees. Sometimes a little voice breaks the stillness, and we know that our friend the cricket has crept near, to warn us that all summers pass.

VI

Perhaps it was my new acquaintance, the gardener, showing me the Venus fly-trap, and sensitive plants shrinking from the touch, who made me forever more sensitive in recognizing something of personality in plants; the lines of individuality seem little less definite than in human beings. Our Boston ivy, growing on the stone wall, is as methodical, as logical as you would expect it to be; the

tiny tendrils, once having with well-considered purpose found their appointed place, cling firmly for all time. On the other hand, there are our wayward wistarias: who knows the mind of a wistaria? One, the most interesting, is a live thing of sudden inspiration, sprung from some wild impulse at nature's heart. Planted in the spring, it waited, to all appearances dead, until late July, then burst into sudden leaf, and grew as if it could not stop growing; as if the soul of an artist, alive with the glory of creating, were making itself visible in the quickening stem and the fern-like leaves. Each year we mark in it a period of swift and splendid growing, a period of fertile quiescence.

One could marvel long over this plant individuality of life and of habit. Some are too vagrant and too free to domesticate; that wild and beautiful thing, the cardinal flower, died in captivity; how had we ever dared to think we could tame her? It was a moist and sheltered spot, with, we hoped, associations that she would find familiar,

but who could ever capture that regal, elusive creature?

The sense of personality in growing things is intensified by many of the processes you go through in your relationships with them. The garden comes alive, in almost human ways, if you work at it long enough; and you lose yourself in pondering on the humanity of all growing things, or the vegetableness of humanity. There is joy in giving plants water and yet more water when the pallor of thirst is on them, and in watching them raise their heads again in radiant freshness. In autumn you must wrap many of them warmly, putting them to bed, gathering leaves in brown, still days of calm, trying to make them stay down, spite of the wilful wind. Wrappings must be tied about rose-tree and vine; rebellious wistaria must be swathed; and newly planted little pines must be, remembering the infant mortality among the others, swaddled and bandaged like Italian babies of the North End. Here is no shame if the garments do not come off all winter long! With the ap-

pearance of the first crocus in the spring, with the discovery, as coverings are thrown off the flower-beds, of green shoots just peeping through the dark earth, comes the inevitable thrill that welcomes new life, human or other.

VII

Strange questions come to mind in garden paths, spring time and autumn both. From the many seeds sown, the many bulbs planted, why do so few grow? Of nature's waste of seed, shown in the great heaps of elm and of maple, winged seeds all, what is the cause? What the result? So I stop and ponder, when seeds from all the hillsides blow hither on the winds of God. Does all this floating thistle-down, this silken-winged drift of milkweed, take root and spring anew? That reckless sowing of the seed, that thwarting by clod and stone, give "thoughts that lie too deep for tears."

I seem to know the mind of the Creator better for my gardening; the yearning, quick-

ening desire, the strange obstacles, — do not things turn out wrong for Him also? Of that seed He sows in mind and soul, what proportion comes up? Does He too now and then forget what seed He has sown in this plot or in that? Do strange and unexpected things grow too in His garden, pinky-purple, spotted things where white lilies should have blossomed? Does He have difficulty in telling the difference between weeds and flowers, wheat and tares?

So may garden walks, like all walks, lead you to infinity, that infinity of wonder wherein we begin and wherein we end. For a garden is a hope, an expectation, and an uncertainty, where little turns out as was expected; where many a joyous surprise and many a disappointment await; where results are incalculable beforehand. If some of your annual hopes wither, yet some are perennial. You are ever on the *qui vive,* the alert; you walk on the borders of the unexplained, in the presence of the mystery of seed.

In a garden we began, the seed of human

life first set in that Garden of Eden, as sacred story tells us; and in a kind of solemn garden we end: "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." So, in deepest thought, may time be annihilated, and the first moment of the race blend with the last upon one's garden path.

THE COMRADESHIP OF TREES

I

Of all the aspects of nature's life which an imaginative sympathy lets us, to a certain extent, share, there is none which appeals to me quite so strongly as that which I find in trees. Doubtless this is partly because, far from sea and from mountains, I was brought up with trees, whose personalities slowly emerged, in individual fashion, from the encompassing mass of things, as did my near of kin in flesh and blood. Those brooding maples that nursed my infancy crooned me many an ancient lullaby, and my earliest childhood felt a protecting quality in their massive trunks and overshadowing leaves, an almost human kindliness, combined with cool, green, leafy indifference to those petty distinctions of right and wrong that vexed my pagan soul. How

many times have I climbed, branch by branch, above the moral standards of my family, to hide in a sheltering tree-top, up where the diminishing trunk swayed perilously against the blue! What sense of escape, what sense of catholic sympathy in feeling the cool bark against my flushed and wicked little cheek!

This sense of personality in trees was strengthened by an early habit of sketching human character in terms of trees, or the other way about. The lesser elms, with their graceful way of standing so debonairly in green meadows or at gateways, with an obvious attempt to please, became to me the sign and symbol of those acquaintances who developed social gifts; I never saw certain tall old rugged oaks, with a fine sternness of expression, without recalling my grandfather; and the Lombardy poplar, forever straining upward, became the emblem of the idealist whose aspiration overtaxed the supporting roots. Whether it was because there were not trees enough to go round, in the matter of interpreting human characteristics, or that I did not know human beings

enough to match all the trees with which I was intimate, I gradually outgrew this childish anthropomorphism, only enough of it remaining to tinge with an odd sense of personality my appreciation of individuality in tree beauty, or in the ugliness of certain trees.

Locusts, I remember, gnarled, broken, incredibly tall, standing about gray, paintless houses whose day is done, and wearing an overplus of expression, half malign. There is something at once impotent and villainous about some of these old trees, as if they had sucked the life out of the dwellers in these houses, and their wicked roots were slowly eating the bones, yet still unsatisfied. Not only near deserted doorways, but along melancholy roadsides I have seen them huddled together in evil groups, plotting perhaps, with a furtive air of secrecy; yet there are many whose peculiarity of look gives them but an odd distinction. I cannot recall any other tree whose youth is so full of charm, with acacia-like delicacy of shaded leaves, whose neglected age is so often ugly, — worn, withered, ragged, — with none

of the beauty and expressiveness of age, such as one sees in ancient oak or apple tree.

On the distinctive characteristics of the many types, their varied beauty, their peculiar ways of taking experience, one could muse in odd moments for a life-time, even the long, cool life of a tree. What individuality of bark and leaf, of bare branches against a winter sky! What differences of expression in beating rain, or falling snow, or wind from out the west! Foremost among those that one remembers with quiet leaves against the blue are perhaps the beeches; their lichen-grown gray trunks and the beauty of their translucent foliage one may not forget. There is always a storied look about them, a touch of imaginative suggestiveness, bringing half glimpses into magic lands. No other tree has quite this quality of delicacy and of strength at once, a momentary charm, as of the flash of drifting butterflies, with time-defying power to stand a thousand years. Long ago, in that odd task of finding among trees resemblances to human friends and kin, I used to ponder who was like

the beech, but found no one among the sturdy Puritan folk whom I knew. It must be some undiscovered type whose acquaintance would mean an entry into worlds of wonder and worlds of beauty; I knew no artists in my childhood. The impression of personality is strong, as I recall a company of incredibly huge and beautiful beeches in an English park, seen long ago, set in the freshness of undying grass about an old country seat; I can recall those lesser, but exquisite ones, that once made the edge of a remembered wood as the very edge of fairyland, cut down in an absentee winter by the knavery of tenants; but most clearly of all can I recall the glimpse, from many years gone by, of early sunshine in a young beech wood, the mass of leaves above the slender stems making in my memory an immortality of living light.

The deep beauty of the pine comes back to me in ways that I may not number, — through its fragrance on sun-warmed days in sheltered, shadowy places; through the expression of wind-blown pines against the sea; through

tossing branches of dusky green against a February sky of deepening blue, — a sharp tang of wind in the air; through the still look of tall, expectant heads against gray rolling clouds before the rain. To westward, a forest of pines makes a soft, dark line against the sunsets; and here and there, in the surrounding country, distinctive figures stand, in solitary grandeur, against the sky, or in stately companies of four or five on a gentle hill slope, or by the still water of the lake, where long reflections give back the beauty, line for line. By the shining water, and the shadowed water, of a little inland river, I know a place of tall pines, where sunlight glints through brown trunks, faintly tinted with green moss, touching the bed of pine needles here and there with gold. Here, if anywhere, one may know how much of the charm of the pine is made up of fragrance and sound, while the deep, sweet, varied music of the high boughs blends with the murmur of the river. Yet the trees in lonely places are no more significant than those growing in spots invaded by human life; in

all the stir and motion of village or city, a certain permanent quiet rests about a tree. I know three pines that rise above asphalted walks and shingled roofs; below is the continued sound of passing feet, but the wind of immemorial time is ever in their branches, and our din is hushed in their primeval murmur and primeval silence.

Among the most individual trees are the slim cedars of the Hudson River hills and New England pastures, growing among gray rock and fern, akin to the Italian cypresses in their singleness of thrust. Here, as there, this living green is not thrilled through with light, as is the case with other trees, but the sunlight makes a golden halo about them everywhere. Not accident, but some deep sense of artistic fitness, has made them in Italy the watchers of the dead. Here too we see them by white gravestones, and along old stone fences or on upland slopes, always giving a touch of definiteness, of character to the landscape. Poignantly expressive, self-contained, they seem, like certain human faces, to make one more keenly

aware of the whiteness of cloud, and the depth of blue in the sky above.

II

I make periodical visits to certain tree friends to see how they are faring. Why not? They cannot come to me. When one vanishes, through old age, or a new disease, or the often cruel and tasteless exigencies of landscape gardening, I miss it as I should an old and valued relative. The huge ancient elm, but lately gone from the centre of the orchard, has left a surprisingly large gap, as did a kindred elm in a distant state, to whom I said good-by many years ago. After these partings the sky seems disconcertingly large and vacant, as it does in the passing of one's human friends. Some, by the mercy of the winds and the gracious gift of rain, are still standing in their places. One is a great oak, of enormous trunk and wide-spreading branches, gnarled, moss-grown, expressive, which I call Ygdrasil, remembering the tree of life of northern mythology. Each year, the long-awaited leaves of

spring, rose-flushed and creamy green, betray the fresh youth and rising life at the heart of its hoary age. These great low oaks, one here, one there, near or distant in this gently rolling country, recall the English woodlands, Sherwood Forest, Windsor, those hospitable forests where every suggestion is of shelter and security. The sweep and droop of the great leafy arms, the circling shelter, make one wonder if this protecting tree suggested to the ancient Celts, King Arthur among them, the type of their circular houses, and perchance the Table Round. In such shaded places, mediæval tales of the lover and his lady who wandered forest-ward and lived there through green and happy years of eternal springtime, no longer seem incredible, so homelike is it under the leafy roof through which the stars blink. For them, as for us, the springtime brought the dawning of fresh color on the old, old gnarled branches; did they know also in autumn the glow, in sheltered places, of red-brown shades, richly blended, as in ancient tapestries?

Our nearest neighbors among trees are not

enduring oaks, but young poplars, which make forever a soft, murmuring noise, as of the coming of April rain, and delicate white birches, which bring us, spring and summer long, the shining companionship of their leaves. The last thing at night, in the darkness, the first in the morning, before I open my eyes, I hear them; the voice of the wind is in them, the voice of the wood, and often have I kept vigil with them, when

> "The little green leaves would not let me alone in my sleep."

These birches at times seem almost unendurably human; sensitive, feminine, they reflect in their rippling every change in the lightest breeze; in the great gales they sway excitedly this way and that with rustling and whisper; very meekly they bow to earth under insistent ice and snow.

In May, the shimmer of the branches makes a glory all about; the least seedlings on the slope below catch the light in their young leaves; and farther away, against a grassy hillside, a line of slender birches stand, thrilled

through by the sun, like a row of pale green young priestesses, vestal virgins, in a procession of spring. Even in autumn, the little golden leaves seem to have a touch of joyous promise, as they twinkle good-by.

Certain tree friends one recalls this way, in moments of charmed color; so maples, best-remembered perhaps in their cool, deep summer shade, above the clear deep green of the grass; or else in autumn, when pale, clear yellow leaves, like light made into color, stretch, canopy after canopy, overhead, and one walks with a gleaming, rustling carpet under foot among the tree trunks which stand tall and dark in this shining at the fall of the year. What more than oriental glory of royal bed these high-piled golden leaves made in childhood, wherein to hide with some beloved book, pausing now and then to watch the dim blue haze of the October distance and dream the future!

I can make friends with almost every kind of tree that is really a tree, and that looks as if it had grown out of the dirt of the earth, but

there are some which rouse in me quick antipathy, such as I feel in the presence of an uncongenial person. There are mountain ashes; they are like ladies of exceedingly artificial manner, wearing ear-rings; their crude color of leaf and berry seems as if devised by a milliner to satisfy prevailing bad taste. I should not at any time be surprised to find that they do not grow from roots, but are supported by wires from underneath. Nor could I ever achieve intimacy with a spruce, or any of those over-regular trees that suggest more the hand of man, with his limited imagination and his love of monotony, than the infinite variety and inexhaustible creative power of nature's self. I know that they are favorite lawn trees, and that they are supposed to have an especial elegance, but is not this a taste which has survived from the seventeenth and eighteenth century passion for uniformity? In that passion lay a devitalizing tendency, a loss of understanding of delicate distinctions and of individualities of line and of color. However, these trees have a certain perfunc-

tory dignity and even, at times, of grandeur; they wear the air of holding important official positions, and you must respect them in their aloofness. But they hold you at arm's length; there is no approach; you cannot get near them, nor sit under them, nor lean comfortably against the bark when the need comes to sit very still and think.

III

There is something oddly human in the experiences of trees, or, perhaps it would be wiser to say something tree-like, arboreal in us. I have heard more than one plausible tale of trees left lonely, dying, perhaps from lack of companionship. Surely it was not merely added exposure to the winds that killed the great ash whose skeleton I saw standing, solitary and grim, on a White Mountain hillside, whence his fellows had been cut away. Left so alone, they never live, if they have grown up with others, a countryman wise in tree-lore told me. Who has failed to notice the look as of human fear of naked,

shivering tree-tops against inky clouds in an oncoming storm, the deep green or the pale under parts of the leaves distinct and awful in the ominous quiet or the ominous swaying? In a storm and in calm one seems to share the mood of familiar trees. There are times when the touch of rough bark, the cool, green, leafy sympathy of trees, brings something more than human companionship. It may be a sympathy which antedates individual experience, and belongs to race history, going back to ancient time,

"Then, when the first of Druids was a child."

From their dimly understood personalities spring hidden consolations, perchance from old sad fate or glad, forgotten years ago.

"Dark yew that graspest at the stones
And dippest toward the dreamless head,"

I have often repeated with appreciation, but I always feel inclined to read it "you", the dignity, the solemn individuality of the tree making it need the intimacy of personal address. Surely there is between human kind

and trees a kinship immemorial, antedating the fret and fever of the nerves, bringing old coolnesses to serve as refuge, making us know the time when spring was no torment, autumn no regret. Still we share something of the fresh joyousness of the young green leaves in their unfolding upon the air, their dancing in the wind, while below the creeping roots gain surer and surer hold upon the earth. What consciousness they have I do not know, but at times I almost envy them their feeling of stability, of permanence. Deep-rooted, almost free of the shifting and veering of things that make the tragedy, and the challenge, of our lives, they know of change little except its beauty, in the rippling of color in spring and autumn, long year by year.

Perhaps most companionable of all are the apple trees, drawing near human dwellings, generously sharing blossom, shade, and fruit, as if in full realization of the brotherhood of men and of trees. Young apple trees in May, in orchard, yard, or meadow, make a brave showing in their wealth of foliage and blossom,

but more significant are old apple trees, in their gnarled and characteristic beauty, their gray and green of lichen, bark, and leaf. The charm of forgotten summers seems to linger here, the humming of vanished bees, the crooning song of blue-birds, with the swift flash of their wings; one associates their silentness with a soft hum and murmur of life not their own. The blossoming of an ancient apple tree, its petals falling, rose-tinted or pure white, from hoary, crumbling branches to the living green of young grass, is as the very blooming of the tree of life in undying renewal. These, of all trees, are most closely associated with our experience and nearest our human lives; through branches heavy with blossom one sees the lighted windows of friendly homes, and knows one's neighbors near. The beauty, charm, atmosphere of the apple tree seems without mystery or remoteness; near our hearths, they share our daily existence, and we grow gray together. Among my dead are two beloved apple trees, known only in their hoary age and the beauty of their slow waning

and fading, but calling always to mind that paradise where stands "an old tree with blossoms", in lovely immortality.

It is odd that this home-keeping tree should, in ballad and old story, be closely associated with supernatural happenings and other-world adventure, as ballad, romance, and learned treatise tell. It was under an apple tree, a grafted apple tree, that the mediæval Eurydice, dame Meroudys, was found, by the wooer from the under-world, and carried away to "a fair country where there was neither hill nor dale", to be rescued later from an enchanted sleep that seemed like death, by the sweet harping of her husband, King Orfeo. Tam Lin was dreaming under an apple tree, — like many a homely Tam, tired with digging and delving, — when the fairies took him; and that evil enchantress of Arthurian story, Morgan le Fay, found Lancelot under an apple tree and bewitched him there. The hero, Ogier le Danois, wandering sadly, an hundred years old, came to an orchard, ate an apple, and lo! a beautiful supernatural lady who carried

him away, young again with her ring on his finger, to two hundred years of more than earthly joy with her in Avalon. How many an old man, sleeping at his own doorway under an apple tree, perchance in spring blossom, has dreamed a dream like this! Perhaps this association of marvel with the sweet, familiar beauty of every day, reflects the sense of folk more child-like than we, — it may be wiser, — that the threshold of this world and that of a world unseen are nearer than we dream.

The call of the other world came to Bran, as Celtic legend, charmingly translated by Lady Gregory, tells, through the sweet music of a beckoning apple branch, bearing white blossoms; and the "quiet man", with "high looks", who summoned Cormac to the land of heart's desire, bore "a shining branch, having nine apples of red gold, on his shoulder. And it is delightful the sound of that branch was, and no one on earth would keep in mind any want or trouble or tiredness when that branch was shaken for him." Seers of beauty, this

primitive people were aware of the mystery of invitation that comes with every waving branch; swaying leaf and blossom ever beckon toward the unknown; half bewitched, we follow, but stop at the barred gateway of eye and ear. The Queen of Fairies, aghast at losing her human lover, cried out:

> "'But had I kend, Tam Lin,' she says,
> 'What now this night I see,
> I wad hae ta'en out thy twa grey een
> And put in twa een o' tree.'"

Did she mean that she would have made him dull and blind, or that, to keep him with her, she should have granted him some woodland insight that would have made him aware of values that had escaped him?

IV

Are we not all drawn beyond ourselves by the charm of opening vistas under overshadowing tree branches? The challenge and appeal of the edge of a wood where interlacing light and shade and dim forest paths invite our feet we may not resist. Murmuring leaves forever

stir the imagination, pique desire, and make us aware of the narrow limits of ourselves. When one stops to think, the fundamental mystery of our existence is linked with a tree; that tree of knowledge of good and evil, — I should like to watch the manner of its growing, sit in its shade! For that matter, we have sat in its shade, the learned in divinity tell us, our race-life long. Watching now the sunlight filtering through the leaves of June, I ponder, unsatisfied, as to why a tree was chosen as a symbol of the darkest problem of our existence.

No beckoning branch has as yet secured me vision of that "comely level land" of Celtic story, where many blossoms fall, through the long day of lasting weather, and the wave forever washes "a pure white cliff at the edge of the sea, getting its warmth from the sun", but mere photographs of mere earthly trees upon my walls keep alive and vital within me strange countries, never to be forgotten. These have a power of rest and refreshment that few other pictured things can bring; something

of the primitive sense of the forest as refuge blends with a feeling of vistas opening out into the unknown. There is one which makes me half shut my eyes, and walk again down solemn avenues of ilex, Italian sunshine at the far end of this deep shade glinting on the rippling water of an old fountain. Ilexes of the Janiculum, with Saint Peter's dome in shadowy distance; cypresses of the Villa d'Este, tall and dark in the mellow light, keeping, beyond those crumbling stone parapets, eternal watch over the Roman Campagna; olive trees of Tivoli, — a mere photograph costing a few francs a dozen, — yet the very look of gnarled trunk and knotted branch is here; and, when the afternoon sunlight reaches that picture, touches the grass, and shines on the olive leaves, you would swear that it was creeping through real trees. Other olives I have, immortally old, growing on the side of Mount Parnassus near the sacred Castalian spring, and affording, through their scarred and ancient branches, a glimpse into immemorial time, down that wonderful valley where the

sun god strode shining to his temple at ancient Delphi.

It is not only through the invitation of the waving branch that trees summon us to the distances; standing on far-off hill or at the sea edge, they pique us, seeming to see what we do not. Something of a sentinel look is worn by Lombardy poplars, as one sees them in their native plain, or the great level lands of Normandy, watching the long white roads, guarding slow, gleaming waters, and distant red-roofed houses. By neglected driveway, or half-forgotten site of what once was home, a single, aging Lombardy poplar, ragged, upright, has the look of some old soldier, still standing at his post when the army has gone by. Old or young, they are forever alert, expectant at their long vigil, watching the sunrises, peering at the stars, on tip-toe to look over the horizon. Something of the mystic significance of the poplar the Greeks must have realized; in the *Odyssey*, poplars grow in the garden of Persephone.

What the poplars strive for, other trees that

I have known seemed to accomplish. Nowhere else in the vegetable world have I seen such individuality of expression as I recall in a brave company of wind-scarred hemlocks, aged, majestic, huge, that stood in the wood to westward, their ragged heads high above other trees. Vanished now, they have left forever in my mind and soul their outline against the sky, that meant high challenge; and my choice of these in character interpretation meant a sacred tribute to the strongest spirit I knew among my kind. Experience was written on them as on human faces; only Vedder among artists can interpret trees like this, with all the expressiveness of their beaten, ancient heads. Militant, undefeated, they stood undaunted at the very edge of things, as if they saw other horizons, and had seen them always. No other symbol, among all the beautiful and significant things that earth has afforded, has been quite so profoundly suggestive as those old hemlocks in the west, on the sky line between this world and the next.

BROTHER FIRE

I

As we sit by the fire on the hearth on a cold winter night, snug in the sense of the smouldering coals inside, and the high-piled snow outside, at times I wield the poker among the logs to better the blaze, at times lean back lazily and read to the accompaniment of singing flame. The brave west door bars out the wind; the slant roof sheds the heavy snow; for a few minutes of blessed truce the abstract questions of human destiny cease to perplex —

> "For I am brimful of the friendliness
> That in a little cottage I have found."

Then come moments when, sleepily, through half-shut eyes, one sees other fires on other far-off hearths, and follows the path of flame down the long trail of human life. Old camp

fires of shepherd folk on Asian plains rekindle here; what did our Aryan ancestors talk about, one wonders, as they gathered round at night to toast their toes on that prehistoric trek? Here glow again great hearth fires of Mycenean kings, and huge war fires of embattled hosts on wide European plains or in deep valleys of the Caucasus. Here one sees new fires blazing in new human homes in times of peace, as the "seed of fire" is carried from hearth to hearth, to quicken life afresh.

Digging in the ashes, full of a sense of possession and of comfort, one ponders on this earliest and deepest human need, the need of man for a little place of his own. The instinct is fundamental; from nest of bird to lion's lair and on to human threshold, it runs through all nature. In all probability the hearth was the first thing made by man; it is that to which, with all his wandering instincts, he most surely returns. It is the very centre of earthly existence, this homely heap of brick or stone, sheltering the spark of divine fire, the red coals fading imperceptibly here to gray

ash, and glowing again in ever fresh enkindling.

Spreading one's hands before its comfort one feels ever a bit guilty, remembering the fingers that go cold. When did this conscience of the hearth stone first arrive, to break the savage gloating over possession? Were other outlaws invited to share the camp-fire heat in earliest primitive folk-wandering? It is indeed but by slow degrees that we have learned that the measure of our affection for our own firesides is the measure of our responsibility in the matter of sharing the coals. Those pagan homes whose hearths were altars, as seen under the wide sky of Greece, were unconsciously significant, prophetic. Whether one's chief care be that the fire leap upward, or outward to warm one's fellow man, its flame must be the flame of sacrifice.

It is well that one remember this and all its far-reaching implications, as one sits by the hearth, inviting to closer companionship one's soul, perchance one's neighbor, and, chief of all, Brother Fire.

II

I count it an honor that this guest of mine upon the hearth has vouchsafed me a kind of intimacy which has relieved many an otherwise lonely hour. Adrift in the universe, it is well to make friends with the elements if we can, and Brother Fire is the closest friend, as well as the fiercest foe, among them all. It is not only for the comfort and the charm of his presence that I value him, and the sense he brings as of perpetual shining of the sun on darkest nights and grayest days, but for the mental quickening that he affords, for no other acquaintance gives more intellectual and spiritual stimulus. The flickering flame, the swift sparks, have some subtle power of lighting ideas and kindling thought to leaping fire. The warmth on one's fingers and cheeks mounts to one's brain; life and experience, and ideas garnered from books, take on a kindly glow.

It is odd that so much of personality clings to this elemental friend. Where he is, abide rest and comfort; finding him, one finds companionship, and is not alone. Not long

ago, entering the sitting-room in early morning, I felt a living presence there, and spoke, asking who it might be, for there was a stir and a whisper, as of life going on. Then I saw that, at an unwonted hour, a fresh-laid fire had inadvertently kindled from old coals beneath the ash, and Brother Fire, an unexpected guest, was making himself merrily at home. In his presence is ever this breath and murmur of being; one learns to converse with him in ancient speech, antedating words.

No one else, perhaps, has ever felt so deeply the comradeship with fire as did St. Francis of Assisi, and in the whole history of imaginative sympathy with so-called inanimate things there is nothing more curious than some phases of this intimacy. "Above all other creatures wanting reason he loved the sun and fire with most affection", is written in *The Mirror of Perfection*. On a time, the record continues, sitting next the fire, the flame caught his linen clothes or hosen near the knee, but he forbade that it be quenched, saying: "Nay, dearest brother, harm not the fire," and but for a

venturesome warden, who disobeyed his bidding and put out the flame, the saint would have perished in that close embrace of his beloved. "For whatever necessity urged him, he would never extinguish a fire, or a lamp, or a candle, with so much pity was he moved toward it." On another occasion, when his cell on Mount Alverna was all aflame, he rescued a certain skin which he wore over him at night, then suffered remorse because, in his avarice, he had refused to let Brother Fire eat the skin for which he yearned; nor would the saint ever cover himself with that skin again. Alas for the complex entangling of human affections! Which of St. Francis's other intimates in the kingdom of his family, the beasts, — ox, ass, or wolf, had given up that skin in the first place? But his love of fire was his intensest love, and his great *Canticle of the Sun* — to him fairer than other created things, and "radiant with great splendor" — sings of Brother Wind, and Sister Water, and our Sister, Mother Earth, as dependent upon this central source of life and light and heat:

"For he is beautiful and joyful and robust and strong."

Eye and imagination alike are spellbound as one watches; even the sparks which run hither and yon in irregular lines, and circles along the soot have ever a wayward charm. Chief among the delights in the companionship of Brother Fire is his beauty, which is inexhaustible and of myriad kinds, of "infinite variety." Whether the resistless charm of leaping flame is more compelling, or the vivid red of glowing coal under gathering clear white ash, is hard to say. Never twice the same, here is a beauty which, like that of music, ceases to be as it comes into being. This vanishing beauty of line and passionate color, gold, red, pure light, with flashes oftentimes of green or of blue, has ever the beckoning appeal of all that is swift and fleet. Flames and waves are alike in their symbolic, spirit-charm, of always coming to be. In both, the remorseless change at the heart of things seems for once — at least in the fires of peace and the waves of sunny weather — not tragic, but

a source of exquisite delight, that swift, living thing, the soul, deriving joy from something as swift and vivid as itself.

It is a beauty that I must follow wherever I see it, for it has the challenge of all questing things, and I recall a goodly company of "bonfires I have known." Those that I have helped make have served a double purpose, of wise destruction and æsthetic charm. Hoary branches of ancient trees; old papers, outworn and outlawed, have together turned to glory before vanishing into merciful nothingness; so dead flowers, too lovely in memory for any less lovely death. Decadent pieces of contemporary fiction, too inflammable to be kept in the house, have had here one, and one only, moment of cleanliness, as the purifying flame has swept the print from the paper that it but defiled. Was I mistaken, or did the bonfire at this moment have a peculiar, unpleasant odor, as of a soul in decay? Here, too, have perished old, old sacred books, worn and soiled by long and reverent use, Bibles, hymn-books, and books of common prayer;

did not the ascending smoke have something of the odor of sanctity as the souls of these volumes returned in flame, out under the open sky, to that pure spiritual impulse that gave them birth?

It is not only my own; I would ever share my neighbor's bonfire, if may be. Ofttimes at nightfall from my window I watch its leaping, golden light against the gathering dusk; sometimes it lights the glimmering green of grass and heavily foliaged trees; sometimes I see its passion of living color against the white radiance of snow. If I but catch a glimpse from far of a bonfire over the hill or down the road, I must follow, watching from a distance. Last night I had great joy in one whose splendid springing fire, in the dusky autumn evening, lighted an orchard corner, etching outlines of bare apple-tree boughs in dark network on barn door and side in ruddy light. Most alluring of all are the autumn fires of leaves along the village streets — when amid the ascending smoke, little creeping flames devour the red and brown glory of the leaves; or when light

and flame leap softly against the shadows of an Indian summer night, making another sunshine. In October days, when the haze of my neighbor's bonfires blends with the dim, blue haze of all things, I fall to thinking, not unpleasantly, of that ultimate bonfire, prophesied by science and Scripture alike, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Foreshadowings of this I had but lately, when I saw the great building where my work of life has been done, burning from end to end; so many years of life and work seeming to vanish in smoke; while those friendly windows, sunny spaces in the shaded recesses of an old library, windows over which trailing tendrils of ivy nodded, through which companionable ideas came and went, turned into terrible windows of flame, through which one looked out upon — what?

III

We can never wholly escape from a feeling of the sacredness of fire; wherever we see it, it stirs within us something from long ago of

the most beautiful of primitive beliefs; like St. Francis, we are fire-worshippers all. The village blacksmith's shop, with the deep glow at its shadowed heart, and its wild shower of sparks as iron is smitten, recalls ancient mysteries; and common bonfires relight the altars of ancient faiths. One I recall from a recent May, when earth was fresh with cool young grass and streams were full, and in recalling it I seem to be remembering something farther back than all the springtimes I have known. In a wide green space beside the golf links the smoke ascends as from an altar fire, and I watch again a primitive rite, perhaps a sacrifice to some earth-goddess of wood and stream. Thin gray smoke half veils the soft greens of the wood, and of the meadow-grass, through which slow water trickles. To the clear golden flame in the gathering twilight minister an old man, a leaping child, a gambolling dog. To what goddess do they bring sacrifice? The goddess of Cleanliness — the only one we have now, in exchange for a whole celestial hierarchy; to her they burn rubbish. Per-

haps the flames on any altar suffice to keep our souls alive! Long after these ceremonies are over I watch — the smoke-fragrance, with its immemorial suggestions, in my nostrils, while the fire slowly flickers, dies, vanishing like a gigantic firefly. Some large, symbolic suggestion is given by these bonfires of spring, and I do not doubt that they are remnants of pagan worship, celebrating casting off the old, the coming of new life. Watching clouds of smoke pouring upward till they fill my whole sunken meadow with a cloudy grayness, against which the flames spring high; watching my neighbor between two slender cedars as, with a long staff, he ministers to flame, I cannot help seeing leaping sacrificial fires at Ægina or at Delphi, against the clear blue sky.

There is small reason for wonder at our instinctive reverence; our lives are circled by fire, by the splendor and the mystery of the stars. Of this the sun at dawn, rising from the rim of water in the east, reminds us, as does the evening star in the fading rose color of the west. Early legend bears wit-

ness to our perpetual concern with flame; no old story is more glorious than that of the Titan Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods and speeding with it in a trail of flying sparks to man. It hints ever of guidance; the torch has marshalled marching hosts of men, and led lone wanderers to safety, flaming against the cloud. Bonfire, it is said, means beacon-fire, and something of beacon significance attaches to light and fire everywhere. Lights in far windows across the intervale, shining out through dusky pine boughs; long lines of light of city streets or village ways, or of wide bridges across dark waters with rippling golden reflections; distant light-houses signalling across dim wastes of sea; the myriad lights of shore cities watched from the receding deck as one sails away — for anywhere — have something of beacon character, as have the many other ways of flame: the fire upon our neighbors' hearths, the light in certain faces, the light of sun and stars. For light is fire, and fire is — what?

Surely the central heart of us, and of all the

universe, the source of all existence, as the source of all destruction. What means this recent carping at the nebular hypothesis, that magnificent conjecture that this infinity of matter started in as living, whirling flame? This new planetesimal theory that earth and other heavenly bodies were evolved by slow accretion out of a cold something or nothingness, seems at first glance less appealing; and yet the idea in the latter of constantly waxing heat may, upon consideration, suit our sense of cosmic fitness better than that other thought of slow waning, until the divine fire has quite died out of our inmost being, and we shall hit against some celestial body and vanish in blessed flame. I dearly love an hypothesis; this exact creature, science, shames us all by the unabashed audacity of her guesses. Surely we may take our choice of the two celestial fairy-stories; in either case, there is something at the heart of us that attests the truth of our nearness to waxing and waning heat; the very working of our minds betrays the ways of fire. Watching the persistent manner in which

flame plays smokily around a place about to kindle, disappearing, reappearing in a single flash, coming more often until it burns with pure, steady blaze, we realize that nothing else in nature so closely resembles the working of the human mind, the human soul. Even thus come and go hope, and faith, and love, fading, failing, persisting, triumphantly burning.

Does this sense of deep intimacy with the fire on the hearth come from our far origin in flame itself, or our slow waxing toward the goal of fire? It is the centre of earthly life; from uncounted ages it has been found the most fitting tribute on altars erected to whatsoever gods; thinkers and poets who have given profound interpretations of existence have found it the most fitting emblem of the enduring life of the soul. No other symbol can perfectly suggest the godhead, from the Hebrew burning bush to the words of Mechtild of Magdeburg: "Our God is a consuming fire, ineffably tending upward above all creatures, endlessly, sweetly, everlastingly burning. As

vital heat, holding eternal life in itself, this hath produced all things from itself."

Dante, the poet of the soul, never so satisfactorily read as by the fire on the hearth, thought in flame and light. The sun in his burning is the one symbol of the Love which moves through all things; flame is the only perfect figure for intensity and reality of love. Dante's paradise is passionate with flame and light; purgatory has something of it, but shaded and dim; and the inferno is inferno partly from being shut down from light and air and fire. But already in inferno there are hints of enkindling; flamelets show the way toward paradise to the travelers, who at the end are left "pure and disposed to mount unto the stars." In paradise, the angels' faces are living flame; the angels are described as live sparks. The words, the figures, used to express feeling and processes of thought are words of burning, flaming, mounting upward; there are flames upon the foreheads of the saints in the Rose of the Blessed. Through all this runs something of the terrible joy-

ousness of fire; and the life eternal has the passion and the beauty of mounting flame.

So one's hearth of an evening, through its leaping fire, its soft glow of coal, both brings back that primal glow of light and heat through endless space, and blazes the way to paradise. Gazing at it, we are aware of supreme charm, this ultimate beauty making us forget all other, whatever its appeal of color, outline, fragrance, as something after all cold, external, remote from this consuming central loveliness discovered in naught save fire. There are moments when it seems that, if we were not so drowsy, we might penetrate the utmost mystery and understand this miracle of life in death. This bright, fierce, fearful creature, who destroys with magnificence of utter horror, murmurs sweet songs upon one's hearth, and suggests a something tender and friendly at the heart of the great terror of the universe.

THE THRESHOLD

I

THERE are times when I grow impatient of our threshold, it is so new, and consequently so expressionless. Under the green door, wide to admit whatever may come of life, it waits, hospitable and expectant, but it is as yet unworn. No hollows tell of the coming and going of patient and impatient feet; no dead have gone forth over it toward that vast threshold that waits us all; nor has the foot of wise physician touched it, coming to usher new life over the threshold of the earth. It is ignorant, slow to learn even the little wisdom we have brought it, and yet experience comes, for it guards a busy doorway. Young seekers after knowledge cross and recross it, for ours is an academic world. Gladly we share our crumb and pour our cup — small,

small, yet blue with the blue of far distance — with these young wayfarers, pilgrims of the soul, who stop with us for a moment now and then in the endless quest of youth. I like the sound of their swift footsteps, with the touch of eagerness, of question, and the firm note of assurance; already they feel the goal. Even if no bride has paused upon our door-step, joyously venturing into the unknown, radiant-faced maidens bring their fiancés for our benediction; breathlessly they study our house-plan, look approvingly or otherwise at our dishes, and glance shyly at our *Catering for Two*. Whatever hospitality we offer means receiving more than we give, for in all this friendly coming and going across our threshold we feel a sense of fellowship with firesides that we shall never see.

We have other, and many, guests, seen and unseen. When the crisp, busy winter days, and the busier days of spring, are over; when all are gone and no one else uses the knocker — old friends step from old books to visit us: Shakespeare, with his timeless wisdom,

droll Lamb, and tender Thackeray, whom, in jest and in earnest, we understand better than we do more modern acquaintances. Old, charméd days come back to linger with us, golden moments of delight in new beauty or new insight, by far sea-shore or distant mountainside. In the summer silences, now and then old sorrows knock, ever so gently; they have been trained to be unobtrusive, and we are too fully occupied to entertain them often. Through the warm fragrances of honeysuckle, rose, and sweetbrier, while drowsy birds chirp outside, they sometimes enter and possess the house, but with new faces, for

> "Sorrows change
> Into not altogether sorrow like."

Sometimes when the eternal struggle between the two human impulses to go, to stay, leaves the former triumphant, I fling forth, impatient of the limitations of my own threshold. Though the little white house with the drooping roof looks the embodiment of home and of sheltering peace, for the time I will none of it, being breathless for knowledge of how

life has fared with others. Lingering watchfully along the open road, I read much of the experience of my neighbors, human and other, written on their doorways. The bank-swallows, with their fascinating thresholds in the sand cliff near by; the orioles, with their safe, high thresholds of silken thread; the squirrel, whose doorway is a hole in a decayed chestnut; the woodchuck, into whose house I almost stepped, uninvited, are of undying interest. I know an old frog who lives down by a bend in the river, a philosopher, a friendly Diogenes, crooning and booming from his damp and charming residence, sheltered by reeds and lily-pads. His surprised and scolding protest the other night when a canoe, gliding too near, violated the sanctity of his watery threshold, roused sympathy of full understanding in me. We are not so far as we think from the stages of unobtrusive life that go on in meadow and wayside. The wood near us is one great threshold of innumerable homes that suggest a hundred points of contact with our own; through the silences, bright, brave

eyes watch the intruder from beyond the guarded doorways. I feel my pride in house-building put to shame by these little houses, often stronghold and larder in one, hidden with wise cunning, and showing a tender and secret wisdom shut from me.

I like to watch, too, people at their doorways: the white-headed carpenter, who sits on the front step of his little brown house by the aqueduct; the bent old woman at the edge of the wood who banks her tiny habitation with leaves when winter comes her way; the "spinsters and the knitters in the sun", on their old-fashioned porches in the old-fashioned villages near by. From all the walks and ways of life what knowledge have these folk brought home; word, or look, or gesture may perhaps bring some fragment of their hard-won wisdom to me as I pass. The wise ways of mothers with their children, and the charm of old faces, I see often through the lighted pane. If, sometimes, rough words resound; if the uncanny howling of the phonograph, the modern banshee, is heard through

the open doorways of the poor, one hears too words that are the very melody of human life. Music floats to me across these thresholds, sometimes fine and sweet and far; two afternoons ago, the Pilgrim Chorus from "Tannhäuser", played by some one who understood, stole through the leaves and set the pace for me, coming, as music should, as a divine surprise.

There is nothing that more fully betrays the individuality of the dwellers within than these entrance ways through which they come and go between their arcana, their secret selves, and the world outside. Character is written on a doorway, and human history on a gate-post. As I stroll past the lodges of the great estates hereabout, the stately hospitality of one tells me all I wish to know about the indwelling human spirit, for the generous paths are open, the wide driveways and curious close-clipped gardens are free to all; while the churlish sign of another, "Positively no admittance", makes up a fairly complete biography. Certain doors wear

always an expression of the wisdom that reigns within. One is that of the village cobbler, who sits forever at work in his tiny shop, among his many lasts, pieces of leather with their pungent smell, shoemaker's wax, awls, needles, and innumerable instruments whose names I do not know. He mends holes, puts on rubber heels, and performs other cunning deeds, for his is the ancient and honorable task of fitting the human pilgrim for the endless way, and he does it well, being of incorruptible honesty. When the latest muck-raking article about corruption in this or that leaves me in despair about the race of mankind, I am sometimes tempted to cut holes in my shoes that I may have excuse for going down to watch the cobbler. He has solved the Labor Problem by laboring all the hours of daylight; at night the uncurtained window shows him often busy by candle-light, his head bent in the fashion belonging only to those who take absorbing interest in their tasks. I have never yet succeeded in getting him to utter a single sentence about anything but

shoes, but watching his silent, busy toil, I feel in the presence of one who Knows.

There are other thresholds that encourage belief in the worth of life, at which I feel like taking the shoes from off my feet, such holy living and dying has been carried on there. Crossing one, I feel at once the jolly and indomitable courage of a widowed mother, who, worn out by the struggle for existence, lately fell ill, but fought her way back from the very gates of death when recovery was impossible, her physicians said, that she might protect her growing boys and girls a little longer. Such tales give one thoughts one hardly dare fathom about the reach of the human will; truly, were it not for the record written on certain thresholds of our kind, we should faint and fail altogether, I fancy, in this allotted task of life.

II

From these habitations which have something of the secret of true living to share with him who enters, I turn sometimes toward

deserted abiding-places, impressive in the silence of life gone by. There is one with worn gray stone steps that lead to a grass-grown threshold out under the open sky. Lilacs blossom by the door-step; old-fashioned pink roses tell when June is there, but the house has vanished forever, and will not give up its garnered wisdom. Not far is a fine, old-fashioned, uninhabited farmhouse, which, in spite of the encompassing quiet, looks as if life still stirred within. But tendrils of woodbine which have reached out from each side of the front door have clasped hands across the portal; the tangle of sweet, blossoming things — lilies of the valley, narcissus, periwinkle, and purple iris — are neglected in the shade of the tall solemn pines, and of clustering lilac and ragged syringa.

I can think of no more charming place for a new home than this, with its beautiful, rough stone gate-posts, its sheltering apple trees, and its vines, vines everywhere, over the house, up the trees, and in great masses over the stone wall — woodbine, bittersweet,

clematis, wistaria, tangled and entwined in loveliness of leaf and blossom. Pathos clings to it now, and it rouses wistful wonder, as does every spot where the flame of human life has gone up and out, whether sloping-roofed cottage of New England, or gray-rock mountain site of prehistoric city on the road to Epidaurus, dreaming against the blue-green sky of Greece, with eagles circling round.

There are other silent doorways that are full of eloquent appeal, such as the churchyard in our busy village, with motors and street-cars whizzing by, and many footsteps crossing and recrossing it past the old white headstones. It gets no moments for itself and for eternity except at dim midnight. There is a still older one in the ancient village to westward, set, with its gray and weather-beaten slabs, moss-touched, half hidden by long grass, about the old white church that wears the charm of an elder day, with its quaint windows and its faded blue blinds. Over all spreads the shadow of a gigantic oak under which, it is said, the apostle Eliot used to preach to the

Indians. Generations of the faithful have worn that threshold of the house of God, and have won their rest in the deep shade without. The quiet hospitality invites us; with the old, consuming curiosity we wait for a little near those grass-grown doorways, silent, lest some shade of the larger significance escape us. Over this vast threshold one steps to — what?

In visiting my vanished neighbors I often find relief, for I like, when watching their abiding-places, either vacant doorways or the resting-places where they lie snugly tucked up in mother earth, to fancy that they lived well and bravely, facing the difficulties and the puzzles that we are facing now, victorious on the whole. Their hospitality is restful compared with that of some of the living, whose dwelling-places resound with anxious talk and question, loud debate and argument, and problems — you would think to hear them that human life had never been a problem before our time! I have an idea that part of this is mistaken zeal for well-being,

that home should be the abiding-place of peace, and that he who has solved the problems of his own fireside has made his best and wisest step toward solving the problem of the whole.

The only unfortunate side of that otherwise perfect relaxation, walking, is that it sooner or later sets you to thinking; the slow jogging on of one's footsteps almost inevitably stirs one's brain, and then, one's mind is busy again, trying to solve the old riddle of existence! So, pondering, I walk until I am tired, then wander back, eager for the shelter of my own threshold, and glad to sink down upon it, unconsciously typifying the deepest paradox of human thought, the need of endless motion, the dream of endless rest. Those two old Greek philosophers who, like all philosophers since, were busy with the eternal apparent flux and change in things — that greatest and most tragic of all earth's problems, the glory and the despair of thinkers since the dawn of time — doubtless held opposing theories partly because they had different habits. Heraclitus, with his doctrine of con-

stant shifting and endless motion through all being, probably paced and paced woodland walks and city streets and sea-shore, where he watched the waves; Parmenides, who taught eternal fixity, doubtless sat ruminating upon his own door-step, and was sure that all is stable and permanent.

As I sit upon my own, weary, somewhat dusty, and full of a sense of the recurring irony of life, I think, half-drowsily, while fireflies pass now and then against the soft darkness of the leaves beyond, of the significance of the threshold. To all of us, human, or bird, or beast, it means refuge; it has thus a sanctity that nothing else in the wide world possesses. It brings the joy of the familiar, the settled, to relieve the haunting sense of endless quest. This longing for the unchanging, sought through shifting theologies, philosophies, systems of thought, may, after all, be profounder than this sense of ceaseless process with which it is constantly at war. Of this longing the threshold is our best and most constant symbol. It stands for man's first faith, and for his final

faith in life. The fact that he can fashion it bears witness to his deep belief in permanency; sitting upon it, he dreams his dream of stable existence — even, if he be so minded, of the time, or the eternity, when the immemorial hope of the race may come true in everlastingness. Whatever belief the threshold may possess is not that of ignorance, or knowledge withheld; there is utter pathos in the thought that this, the symbol of the lasting, must, more than any other part of the house, bear witness to all there is of change. The threshold survives flood and fire, wars and revolutions, cyclones, material and immaterial, external and internal. That enduring trust in home, one of the deepest things in human nature, is magnificent in this universe of constant flux and devastating change. Its sign and token, the threshold, flings its challenge to accident, disaster, sickness, death, for

> "It is more strong than death,
> Being strong as love."

OLD TRAILS

I

At our doorway we find it hard to tell whether the nearness or the distances are more enticing. The shade of one's own trees is grateful, and the small pink-and-white clover that blossoms in the lawn close to the earth is sweet; yet the far-away paths are always calling, calling, as they must ever to human souls. Past the blue delphiniums of the border, themselves suggestive of distance, as a subtle-minded gardener once told us, to the hazy blue of the distant hill is an inevitable journey for the eye, and where the eye wanders the feet would fain follow. Wherever we glance, we see fixed and permanent surroundings slipping into the beginning of trails, Our neighbor's trim green lawn, surrounded

by the tidiest hedge in the world, under a huge, overshadowing elm, would seem to be a very abiding-place, stationary and unchanging, yet it is here that we get our first glimpse of the highway, and one glance at the open road is sometimes enough to set the feet a-going. Another way, one sees the living green of sunlight in the wild grass and least birch-trees on the hillside, and may not stay, for a little wind entices, and one follows with swift feet down the slope, through the intervale where a stream wanders, up the hill where it runs riot in the long, waving grass, to a sunny bit of road which lingers as if waiting for a comrade before entering the shadow of the wood.

As we stand wavering on the threshold, uncertain whether to go or stay, spring calls to us in the early note of bird or the cry of the hylas, in young greens and faint rose tints that run swiftly over distant hill and wood; or autumn beckons, with its magic, haze-haunted distances, and its gray-blue mists beyond the oaks that burn deep-red with the late fires of fall. Even winter, sometimes

austerely, over white snow that seems the end of things, sometimes gayly, with tingling in the blood, stings one forth, over crisp paths, by naked, lovely branches against a clear, cold sky, past roadsides where every branch and withered blossom bends with its soft weight of new-fallen snow. And the call of the summer nights, the charm of the road one cannot see, who can resist that? The familiar pathways are full of challenge of the unknown; sweeter, more penetrating odors creep out in the darkness, from dusky tangles of vine and shadowy fields; the common roadways seem to end in stars.

This is a gently rolling country, that lingers in its passage toward the sea, by many a low-lying meadow and reedy stream; and through it, here, there, and everywhere, a little loitering river wanders its own wet way. If we lack opportunities for steep climbing, yet there are gentle heights to tempt our feet. One, that to which the delphinium beckons, you reach, after your tramp by the roadside is over, through an old New England pasture,

full of unforgetable charm. By gray rocks covered with ancient lichen, by clumps of tall fern you go, climbing a broad slope past wild rose and barberry tangles. Blueberries, dim in color as this hill summit from our distant home, grow here among the bay, and juniper, and sweet fern. You hold a few in your hand as you go climbing on, past the tiny sentinel cedars that dot the close grass, to a broad and gracious summit. You are higher than you thought. Miles and miles about you stretches the encompassing green country, with the silver line of the river, and the soft, deep-foliaged trees, out and out; the entire horizon is clear, in perfect circle. In the west lies the faint blue outline of distant mountains, and between, slight ridges that the misty sunset finds, wave upon wave of land shining out toward the sky. It is silent, except for the tinkle of a cow-bell now and then, and the cawing of a hoarse old crow.

Some of the roadsides about us are as neglected and as full of charm as if they did not know they are living in an era of landscape

gardeners. Long grass sways by the fences; wild grapevine, berry-bushes, woodbine tangle there; asters, white or purple, and tall, starry goldenrod nodding over fences still are spared us, by the grace of God and the forgetfulness of man. That highway whose invitation is ever before us charms by its onward directness, its overshadowing trees, elms, oaks, and ancient maples, and by its bordering meadows. Neither gypsy caterpillars nor automobiles have as yet destroyed it, though both are making progress. This highway, in all seasons, in all moods, we know, in sunlight, starlight, and in misty rain. Here, in a sheltered hollow, spring comes earliest; over the half-hidden, sunny water one sees the delicate ripple of young leaves, myriad-tinted; trailing willow branches are there with their faint golden gleam, and red blossoms of the maple, all wearing the iridescent glory of April days. To the broad grassy meadows just beyond, in May, the bobolinks come home and build again, madly singing in the summer.

On sleepy, sunshiny afternoons, so great

is the charm of these meadows, and the pale, indescribable green of the young wheat-field near, or its later golden grain, that you almost forget the open road. A sense of warmth and rest and fulness of life possesses you; you sit upon an "old gray stone" and doze in the sun, with the fragrance of pine in your nostrils; then you waken with a start and trudge on.

Still more compelling is the invitation of this highway in late evenings, in the dampness and wet fragrance of full summer. Everything calls one — the booming of the old frogs from the low, marshy pond, answering each other from under the great willows on opposite sides where they make their homes, reminding one of that other inspired frog pond not far away, where, in the very heart of academic shades, hylas sing first in the spring. Tree-toads are calling softly from shadowy trees close to the road, and the cheep of drowsy birds comes from unseen nests near by. Fire-flies everywhere lure one on; that field of wheat is full of them; so is the long grass where bobolinks are asleep.

There is another road, whose loveliness at night belies a touch of sordidness it wears in the light of day. Here we go to see the stars, for it commands wide open spaces, — Orion, the Pole Star, the Corona Borealis, and the steady swing of our stride seems in unison with their steady swing. Common things take on a dim, mysterious beauty, lent by the fireflies and the star-shine. Through the soft darkness of the neighboring corn-field the tasseled tops shine like dull torches, as we stop to breathe in the sweetness of it all — the moist, cool sweetness. Would that John Keats might have smelled this of a summer night!

Something is always calling us from chair or hammock in our birch-trees' shade — the drifting flight of a butterfly, the beat of a swift bird's wing, floating bit of thistledown, or flower and driven leaf of autumn, sharing the wind's wild flight. I would not have the challenge of the distances find me lacking, nor discern heights or glimpses of far roads that I do not know. This sense of constant quest is but part of the eternal impulse which

we share with all the universe toward change and movement. It is well that radium — potent in modern surgery — has opened the minds of scientists to a suspicion that matter is but a form of energy, of motion, and that they begin to waken to an idea suggested by Greek philosophers more than two thousand years ago! Great is the joy of moving where all things move; deep is the thrill of that sense of wide companionship that nothing escapes. The symbolism of the open road has always been our best and profoundest symbol; the "pilgrimage of man" suggests more potently than any other figure our lot between the cradle and the grave. There is an unescapable charm in feeling one's feet move slowly along the common highway; each step reaches back to our earliest beginning, and onward to one end, connecting our two ultimate selves. Something primeval perhaps lingers in it, a sense of those earliest stages when the animal found itself floating free from the old vegetable fixedness, in fearful joy of oozy motion; something too of the thrill of

those first moments of ability to choose a path, the flash of the living will through the incipient stages of animal being.

II

The thought of one's primeval self suggests primeval process; there are walks hereabout that bear witness to the ceaseless growth, the stir and unrest, at the heart of apparently stable things. Such is the path about our little lake, through formal garden and through wild wood path by shelving shore, under overhanging trees, past jutting points where the reflected beauty of moss and tree ripples down into the water with exquisitely changing gradations. In its silent face you read eternal process, in the sunlit ripples at the edge, and in its utter smoothness, in the shimmer of young leaves in spring, and myriad blended shades of autumn, in reflection of floating cloud and flying wings. Never is it twice the same, whether it lie at early winter nightfall reflecting the deep gold of the western sky, bordered by the soft brown of its broken, wooded shores,

— the dusky, deepening shadows at the edge all gold-inwrought; or, spread out under the July sky, encompassed by rich summer foliage; or, stretching out on its Avalon days of Indian summer, a silver shimmer of water under the silver haze that lends it a look of mystery and of endless distance. On the more rugged path about the upper lake, between hemlock branches, we get glimpses of an irregular wild shore, and of secluded corners overgrown with reeds and lily-pads. We know, for the wise have told us, that, through timeless and imperceptible nature process, our bright sheet of water is filling up from the other. Through the silence, we can almost hear

> "The moanings of the homeless sea,
> The sound of streams, that, swift, or slow,
> Draw down Æonian hills, and sow
> The dust of continents to be."

This meadow, bravely keeping its ancient grace of waving grass, daisies, and buttercups under observatory and dormitory walls, was once a bit of lake bottom. Of the glacial

action that determined the shape of our rounding hills and wide sand plains, dim pictures form themselves in one's mind, but the "imagination boggles at" that cold world of ice. Curiously interesting is the walk along the "esker", or bed of a glacial river. High, winding, with uniform wooded slopes below — you would think it an aqueduct but for the curves. You are with the tree-tops, touched with faint spring color or autumn-tinted, and you know, though you are far up in the air, that this is the bed of the most ancient type of river. You are going the way the water went uncounted years ago, under the slowly melting mass of ice, heaping up débris.

The aqueduct in places would seem to be imitating the esker, save that it runs straight, at times with even, grassy slopes many feet high. Here it is carried over marshy stream or deep gully by stately Roman arches of gray stone, the dull Pompeian red of its brick walls fading and crumbling above the green, whence you see distant Pegan beyond grassy marsh and the winding river, forever flowing

softly between green banks or brown. All about, a network of aqueducts, converging cityward, afford for us and for other tramps alluring trails, with always a footpath running through the grass, sometimes at a height, sometimes across a level meadow, most charming of all when sunken and sheltered by high banks, where deep cutting was necessary to keep a level for the water. Here summer lingers into autumn, and autumn keeps winter out long after the highways are surrendered. Violets and low wild roses blossom along the slender trail; the gently sloping sides are clothed with gracious grass and fern; goldenrod, asters, sumac, and scrub-oak bring autumn glory there.

For country near a large city, there is an amazing amount of woodland hereabout. Though much of it is second growth, and it lacks the deep solemnity of the ancient wood, it has the immemorial appeal of the forest, which is different from the appeal of anything else earth has to offer, more intimate, more subtle, perhaps going farther back. There

are wood-roads here and there, deep ruts with grassy strips between; you can walk for miles under delicate, translucent young leaves in spring, and see everywhere about the flame of green sunlight in ferns that light the shadowy corners. In autumn, the brown and red and gold, interlacing overhead, the slim tree-trunks, the tracery of branch and twig, recall, but with far greater beauty, the glory of living color of the Sainte Chapelle. Here one is aware, more deeply than anywhere else, of eternal process, stir, and change, at nature's very heart. Some rustle across the stillness brings constantly a sense of encompassing life.

> "Enter these enchanted woods,
> You who dare.
> Here the snake across your path
> Stretches in his golden bath;
> Mossy-footed squirrels leap,
> Soft as winnowing plumes of sleep.
> . . . . . .
> Change, the strongest son of Life,
> Has the Spirit here to wife."

If you wish a companion for your wayfaring, perhaps you seek this little river that goes gently, with innumerable twists and

windings, toward the sea. From the highway you pass through an opening, once guarded by a pair of bars; you follow, through a low bit of meadowland, a road deep grown with grass, daisies, and buttercups blossoming at the side and between. Under the aqueduct, beyond the tall grasses of the marsh, where wild blue iris grows, beyond the reeds and rushes, you find the river, the slow little river, the laziest stream in all the world, outside of England. It is, of all the rivers in existence, the one for those divided in their minds, not knowing whether to go or to stay at home. It flows gently past its mossy, wooded banks, so full of reflections of birch and maple, pine and dogwood, that it must almost think itself a forest, with so untroubled, so clear a surface that you cannot tell, by looking, which way the current goes, and the floating leaves give little aid. This is because of the many curves and turnings; it goes back on its course again and again. Opposite lies a great estate, once open to the wayfarer, now, alas! closed, with miles of magic, tree-bordered driveway.

"Five miles, meandering with a mazy motion,
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,"

and still does, I fancy. Sacred? Of course! Is it not the river Charles?

It is an enchanting stream, gracious, companionable. In spring and autumn, canoes with young men in white flannels and girls in flower-hued garments float down it; and boats go by bearing proud parents, happy children, and happier dogs. The path skirts the shore closely, through beds of fern, past wild honeysuckle and tangled vines, up a little slope fragrant with pine. You reach at last a beautiful pine wood, with its fragrances, its brown bed of needles, its "sunny spots of greenery", and here you stop, letting the river ripple on through wood and meadow to the sea.

So we keep moving, moving, in spite of the enticement of the threshold, the immemorial desire to wander being ever with us, the need of being up and away. This slow progression sets mind and spirit free; you walk out of old worries, old tangles, into fine freedom.

And the joy, the sheer joy of going on! Beauty is greater because you pass and go; the charm of the wild rose that you see but once haunts you endlessly. The sting, the challenge, the potency of change have deeper cause than we know for so commanding us. If each step reaches back through eons of life to the very threshold of being, it reaches forward still more endlessly. Each onward footstep brings its thrill; it is one footstep nearer the goal, and seems at times to be about to touch the very outer edge of mystery.

The most appealing path is no path at all, but a bit of open country, where high slopes with softly swelling hills and hollows stretch out like a bit of the Wiltshire downs. In the bottomlands below, the river comes nearest us, and here lies a sunken meadow, safe and hidden; automobilists cannot see it as they speed along the highway, for on one side it is wood-sheltered, on the other guarded by the gently rounding hills. It is beloved by birds and butterflies, by fireflies, crickets, and by us. Most of all we love it at the fold-

ing-time of the birds, when we pace the even green and hear the good-night chirping, with the gurgle of the frogs, and the "noiseless noise" of slow water. This, like the upper slopes, is covered by smooth short grass, with the gold of close-clinging buttercups everywhere, tiniest daisies, and reddening sorrel tints. Like much of New England, it has no luxuriance of vegetation, but a spare and delicate beauty, wrought by nature in one of her fine, ascetic moods; yet the soft hollows of the downs keep all winter, under the snow, the freshness of living grass, and the first flush of pale green in earliest spring over hill and hollow has enchantment that I find nowhere else.

I know the way I shall take, when the last moment comes. Not by the highway shall my feet fare forth, nor any main-travelled road; not by aeroplane or motor, but afoot and alone, under the wide-branching oak, over the brow of the little hill, dipping into the hollow, by the half-hidden path bordered by sweet fern and the least goldenrod, up the

broader slope where the world opens out to westward. Bare hill and hollow, stretching on and on; trees beyond trees; a glimpse of the lake, and beyond — the red-brown bars of sunset. It would seem but an easy step from this world to a fairer — if indeed any could be more fair, which I doubt.

THE FINAL PACKING

As I jog on in years, by comfortable stages and slow, more and more often the old figure, favorite of poets and of moralists, comes back to me, of life as a journey wherein, whether one will or no, one must keep moving on. This increasing sense of perpetual adventure brings its own delight; on the other hand, more troublesome becomes that deep feeling of possession of things that impede a journey and hamper one in the eternal wayfaring. If I recapture at times something of that joyous mood with which I undertook my first journey to Italy, with an absurd, illogical intimation of likeness in the destination, there comes back too that old realization of the need of minimizing my personal possessions — taking then, I remember, the form of a conviction that, for the brief journey, I must carry nothing

that would not go into a huge extension bag. It is good to pack and travel now and then the ways of earth, because one must perforce sort over old possessions, letting the less worthy go; even here one cannot take one's all. If this task proves puzzling, what of the final sifting and selecting, the spiritual house-cleaning that must come before the ultimate packing?

At the outset I find myself hampered in my setting forth; I have lived so long with this earthly furniture, have grown so fond of it, that I am loath to start for any region whatsoever to which I cannot take it. My father's desk, my mother's great gilt mirror, my grandmother's rush-bottomed rocking-chair — the passing years and the care I give these things but tighten their hold upon me. I sit and watch my treasures, wondering. The Baluchistan rug, with the leopard-skin pattern; the Herati; the hangings with the pomegranate pattern, deep red and deeper blue, secretly darned in many places by my devoted fingers — how shall I let them go? What those do who really have great pos-

sessions I can but conjecture, yet I suppose that, as the number increases, the intensity of the grasp lessens; the human hand, after all, cannot hold more than it can hold. These insistent household furnishings — it would not do to sell them, or to give them away; they would but trouble me the more, for nothing looms so large as joy or possession foregone. Here, I sometimes forget them, but were they gone beyond my walls I could not get them out of my mind with longing for them back.

There is the trouble — they get into the wrong place! I leave them in living-room and dining-room; I find them in the secret, inner chambers of immaterial me. My house of wood was built large enough for all that it must shelter; house room I have; my difficulty is in finding mind room for my goods and chattels, for they take more space than I would have them. Amphibian as we are between flesh and spirit, as old Sir Thomas Browne used to say, what shall I do when the time draws near when I must choose my element? I cannot go carrying my rugs,

like an old Armenian pedler, along that narrowest way, yet my mind is full of these things, and I hope to take that with me. I do not like the way my fingers cling to the little mahogany table; there will be difficulty in making them let go. The thought of the highboy at the gates of heaven troubles me; tug and tug as I will, I cannot get it through.

There is some excuse for these prepossessions, for many of these articles have, through long association, ceased to be mere bits of furniture and have become embodied emotions, memories, states of mind. That aforesaid desk — it is not its deep rich red-brown of old black walnut that holds me, nor its fine, severe contours; it is the personality that called it into being; its dignity, its silences are my father's own. It gives the same infrequent, grave reproofs; it seems now and then to burst into deep, uncontrollable, shaking laughter, the unquenchable laughter of the Homeric gods. It is no mere object, but a something fashioned for my father's needs, something that became himself!

The old daguerreotypes — it is easy to think of them as half-way between the spirit world and the material, in the elusive charm, face, expression, evading you always in whimsical fashion until just the right light, just the right angle, wins a moment's vision. Slim-waisted, erect, with parted waving hair demurely brushed behind their ears, in charming, old-fashioned, surpliced gowns of flowered muslin that they made themselves, my mother and her sister, smiling out upon the world, before trouble came, before we came — is this a mere material property, may I ask, or is it strange that I should hate to leave it behind? Or this, which is no daguerreotype, but always a moment's fit of mirth — this now triumphant and masterful leader in the suffrage movement, at six years old, in low-necked dress, curls hanging at each side of her pretty head, her bashful finger in her mouth? And that old mirror, which has reflected the few weddings, the many funerals, is to me no mere object; it is a record of faces, illumined faces, grief-stricken it may be, but holding the high ex-

pression of fine insight that comes, perhaps, but seldom, and most surely through sorrow. If we are amphibian between flesh and spirit — what, pray, is this, with its unfading reflection of pure soul?

And these books — they seem to be tangible things upon my shelves; I turn the yellowing leaves and see quaint pictures, fragrances of old days come to me. They seem to be tangible things, but they are breathless moments of wonder at new beauty. The Coleridge, the Keats are indeed

> "Magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn."

They are whole enchanted days of mirth, of tragic suffering, for the old leather-bound Shakespeare, despite its wickedly small print and its absurd pseudo-classic illustrations, meant the anticipatory sting and thrill of life itself. These books are not things; they are not mere possessions; they are moments of aspiration, of struggle, of victory or defeat: for "a good book is but the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured

up on purpose to a life beyond life." Surely, nothing in the relation of soul to body is a deeper mystery than this marvel of the transmission of the spiritual through mere material devices of paper and printer's ink. Child-fingers touch the leaves, and there flows in upon the young spirit the splendor of those who vanished long ago from sight and sense. Through them the vision and the passion of old prophets, of old poets, is alive and quick in all of us to-day. I have no sense of real loss in léaving these books behind; they are translated and transmuted into inmost me. There is one I would fain take with me, so thin, so slender in its austere black cover that I could almost, I think, smuggle it over the border line that separates the visible from the invisible, the old *Sartor Resartus*, which I used to learn by heart as if it were poetry. I cannot hear its name to-day without a sudden leaping of the soul, a thrill in the blood.

Great as is the difficulty about the material or so-called material things, greater still is

the difficulty in getting ready my purely mental luggage for that last long journey. What have I in the way of intellectual and spiritual furnishing that those celestial customs will permit to pass? How much must be thrown from me shred by shred that I may go in?

This silent, thoughtful, ironic, watching tendency, may that go with me through the divine adventure as it has through the earthly? I could not help it; it was bestowed upon me; one must not throw one's father's gifts away. If it has meant at times, through fear of doing harm, a lack of radiant, immediate, feminine interference with things; if its hesitations have been, perhaps, incomplete without that beard to stroke, slowly and more slowly, still, if it has been in many ways a poor thing, it yet has been mine own, and I know not how to fare forth without it. I can only trust that with it came something of its old accompaniment, that sad sincerity of honest act that ran steadfastly through all questioning of God and doubt of man.

And that quick humor, that "sense of sudden glory", at keen thrust of wit or revelation of incongruity in things — did he take that with him, and did he get it through the narrow gate? I cannot think of him without it; for him endless existence would be flat and tame were it gone. Surely, lacking this, that silent power of thought deep within himself could not get the full savor of what is to come, for life — and Shakespeare — prove that the deepest significance of any experience may not be without the penetration of humor.

I think of other inheritances — my mother's ready hospitable instinct — may that go with me in my extension soul? Without it, how could I get used to the hosts of saints and of angels — Michael, Gabriel, and Presbyterians all, with whom my childhood was instructed, heaven is peopled; those neighbors of eternity whose acquaintance I have sometimes dreaded? This instinct has been intermittently my own, but with a difference. With her, by some survival of Scotch-clan feeling, it concerned all relatives however remote, and was con-

nected with thoughts of bed and board; with me, it concerns strangers, the more unknown the better, and is evinced by swift, mute question as to how far they have solved the mystery that baffles us all. Wayfarers whom I meet for an instant on railway-car or avenue, friendly beggars, faces that I see but once and understand — surely Michael, Gabriel, and all Presbyterians cannot be so much stranger than those with whom I have in a minute's flash of sympathy made friends.

And that maternal passion of faith: as I trudge on with staff and scrip, I think that some small part of this — would that it might have been Benjamin's share, for I was the youngest — is mine. Yet the heaviest articles of that Scotch creed I can neither lift nor carry. How could I bear them across the heavenly hills, who could not hold them here? I remember with pity how hard a burden for frail old age became that thought of endless punishment and the stern image of a righteous judge, and I try to imagine that sudden sense of lightness and of joy with which they

were dropped at the great portal, while the soul passed through without them.

Going on with my inventory, I find that, after all, there is not much to take. The old longings, ambitions, even some of the conscientious scruples seem to fall away. As one weighs in the hands in packing before the open hand-bag this garment or that, pondering whether it should go in, I sit and weigh many things, inherited and acquired, realizing with relief that they may be left behind. I shall indeed travel light! Dim stirrings of memory in regard to the resources of London and of Paris with respect to a new outfit at the journey's end blend, not blasphemously, but figuratively, in joyous foretaste, with far-off promises in regard to making all things new. The mental accumulation of all these years, information in regard to this or that, conscientiously acquired, as conscientiously shared — the business of a lifetime — how gladly do I throw it all away! They are useless, these facts, and wholly of earth; in all this pile there are no charts and

maps of celestial geography that may help me now. Not with one's old notebooks does one enter a new country, but with wide-opened eyes. I want no cold mental stores with which to go on; I cannot be hampered with mere dates and summaries and ideas. It is with a fresh mind that I must start, a fresh sense of adventure, as of a schoolboy who has his books away. Even the philosophers I shall leave behind — how gladly, at the outer confines of Space and of Time, shall I say farewell to them, for I am tired of trying to think, and thinking space and time is wearisome! The poets I shall carry a bit farther: Shakespeare, Shelley, Browning sing songs at heaven's gate. I seem to divine that, of all one's mental furnishings, the reasoned formulæ, like the facts, shall not linger. Only the spiritual impulse, the quickening mood, the leaping flame of mind and of spirit shall persist.

Pondering on that last journey, the old figure of the wayfarer becomes the figure of the runner; one can take but the swiftness in one's feet, the soul's deep courage, the en-

ergy within as one speeds toward that goal. Not even that most cherished property, one's high-piled deeds of good, and charities, if such there be, may go; only the impulse that led to them, the pity, the sympathy with man and beast. I begin to discern a more profound significance than I had dreamed in the rules of that far Inn, so different from those of the inns of earth, in refusing to admit any luggage at all, instead of refusing those who come without. The old warning that having all we lóse all; the simple statement that, as we brought nothing into this world, we can take nothing away, become the clew to some dim knowledge of the immortal in us — the inner vitality of mind and of soul, the quickening intellectual aspiration, the quickening sympathy. That which went out from one, not that which one tried to save; that energy of creative love that gives, not asks — this is the purely spiritual part of one, and one's only real possession. This is the secret of our going stripped and empty-handed through heaven's gate.

So I sit and review my belongings, material, mental, spiritual, aware afresh, in this eternal paradox of things, that I may keep only that which I did not try to keep; that the secret of holding, in death as in life, is in letting go.

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